

THE INTERPLAY

OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

LA INTERACCIÓN ENTRE EL LENGUAJE Y LA CULTURA EN LA COMUNICACIÓN INTERNACIONAL

Laman Maharram Gasimli^{1*}

E-mail: laman.gasimli@au.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3486-3053>

Heydar Izzat Guliyev¹

E-mail: heydar.guliyev@au.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4323-2352>

Zuleykha Murad Baghirzadeh¹

E-mail: zuleykha.baghirzada@au.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4743-2893>

Saadat Davud Farhadova²

E-mail: saadetfarhadova@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1483-6354>

Gulchohra Gadir Gadirova¹

E-mail : gulchohra.gadirova@au.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5866-5471>

¹Azerbaijan University. Azerbaijan.

²Baku Business University. Azerbaijan.

*Corresponding author

Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Gasimli, L. M., Guliyev, H. I., Baghirzadeh, Z. M., Farhadova, S. D., & Gadirova, G. G. (2025). The interplay of language and culture in international communication. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 17(4). e5320.

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, in an era of unprecedented intercultural contact, effective communication hinges not only on linguistic proficiency but also on cultural competence. Traditional language teaching, however, often neglects the cultural dimension essential for mutual understanding. Taking this into account in this research it is examined how divergent linguistic conventions and cultural frameworks interact in real-world settings. Our results indicate that minor semantic discrepancies and differing contextual norms can precipitate significant misunderstandings, while cultural “filters” shape perceptions of silence, directness, and decision-making processes. Crucially, we show that dual sensitivity to both grammatical structures and underlying cultural norms is required to “read between the lines.” Therefore, interventions—such as real-life simulations, immersion experiences, and targeted intercultural training—prove effective in cultivating adaptability, empathy, and trust across cultural divides. By fostering intercultural communication competence as a key soft skill, organizations and educators can minimize barriers, enhance collaborative synergies, and promote authentic dialogue in our increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: Communication, Modern life, Linguistics, Intercultural communication.

RESUMEN

Hoy en día, en una era de contacto intercultural sin precedentes, la comunicación eficaz depende no solo de la competencia lingüística, sino también de la competencia cultural. Sin embargo, la enseñanza tradicional de idiomas a menudo descuida la dimensión cultural, esencial para el entendimiento mutuo. Teniendo esto en cuenta, en esta investigación se examina cómo interactúan las convenciones lingüísticas y los marcos culturales divergentes en entornos reales. Los resultados indican que pequeñas discrepancias semánticas y las distintas normas contextuales pueden precipitar malentendidos significativos, mientras que los filtros culturales moldean las percepciones del silencio, la franqueza y

los procesos de toma de decisiones. Fundamentalmente, se demuestra que requiere una doble sensibilidad tanto a las estructuras gramaticales como a las normas culturales subyacentes para leer entre líneas. Por lo tanto, las intervenciones “como las simulaciones de la vida real, las experiencias de inmersión y la formación intercultural específica” resultan eficaces para cultivar la adaptabilidad, la empatía y la confianza a través de las divisiones culturales. Al fomentar la comunicación intercultural como una habilidad blanda clave, las organizaciones y los educadores pueden minimizar las barreras, potenciar las sinergias colaborativas y promover un diálogo auténtico en un mundo cada vez más globalizado.

Palabras clave: Comunicación, Vida moderna, Lingüística, Comunicación intercultural.

INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of applied linguistics, language can be understood as a structured system of signs that enables the creation of comprehensible messages through the use of grammatical and semantic rules (Tamburelli, 2021). On the other hand, cultural anthropology emphasizes that each linguistic expression is profoundly influenced by the socio-historical context and by symbolic practices that reflect dynamics of power, identity, and a sense of belonging (van Dijk, 2009). Meanwhile, social psychology highlights the importance of language in shaping collective perception and in the assimilation of prevailing cultural norms. Together, these disciplines agree that language and culture are intrinsically related and mutually shape each other, making it impossible to understand one without the other (Völkel & Nassenstein, 2022). Therefore, in a globalized environment characterized by economic, academic, and communication interactions that transcend borders, linguistic knowledge and the ability to understand cultural nuances is being recognized as highly desirable soft skills (Hladkoskok et al., 2022). Language not only serves to communicate ideas but also expresses and shapes the worldview of those who speak it. Culture, in turn, encompasses a network of shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that guide how individuals perceive and interpret reality. Therefore, the connection between language and culture allows us not only to interpret transmitted messages but also to establish relationships of trust, build shared identities, and negotiate expectations in diverse and multicultural contexts (Zhylenko & Beresneva, 2022).

For example, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis—or linguistic relativism—proposes that the structure of language influences how its speakers experience and conceptualize the world. According to Whorf, grammatical and lexical

differences between languages can determine variations in attention to categories such as time, space, or causal relationships. Critics of this position point out that extreme relativism fails to explain the capacity for translation and the transfer of knowledge between diverse cultures (Siewert, 2024). However, research in linguistic cognition has re-emphasized the notion that language acts as a perceptual filter, at least partially conditioning patterns of thought and behavior. On the other hand, Edward T. Hall proposed the distinction between high-context cultures—where much of the information is communicated implicitly and depends on the context—and low-context cultures—where communication is more explicit and direct. This typology is useful for understanding discrepancies in negotiation styles and conflict management (Liu, 2024). Hofstede, for his part, identified cultural dimensions such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term orientation, and leniency versus restraint. These dimensions allow for the profiling of nationalities and organizations, facilitating communicative adaptation strategies. In this sense, beyond words, gestures, facial expressions, proxemics (use of space), and chronemics (perception of time) play an essential role in the transmission of meaning (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2021).

Therefore, foreign language teaching has acquired special relevance, although it is recognized that a purely grammatical approach is insufficient if the cultural component is not integrated. Undoubtedly, international communication education plays a decisive role in providing individuals with the linguistic and cultural competencies necessary to interact effectively in increasingly dynamic and interconnected global environments. To this end, the importance of training programs that combine language learning with real-life case studies and immersion experiences has been highlighted, so that students develop not only linguistic fluency but also intercultural sensitivity, the ability to recognize and adapt different communication styles, and the skill to anticipate and resolve potential misunderstandings (Aljarelah, 2024). Furthermore, education promotes critical reflection on stereotypes and prejudices, fosters empathy by exposing learners to diverse perspectives, and prepares future professionals—whether diplomats, businesspeople, or teachers—to lead international projects with an ethical and collaborative approach.

Beyond conflicts, the lack of effective intercultural dialogue prevents the exploitation of synergies in research, technological development, and humanitarian projects. The mutual enrichment that could emerge from collaboration transcends the mere translation of words; it involves sharing worldviews. Therefore, the development of

intercultural communication competence—which includes cultural awareness, adaptability, and empathy—is emerging as a key soft skill for the future (Figure 1). Therefore, it's no longer surprising to find people who speak multiple languages or come from very diverse backgrounds in today's world, characterized by greater cultural mixing than ever before. However, as previously mentioned, when trying to interact across these cultural barriers, we face additional obstacles that accompany this growing contact. It's not only necessary to be familiar with the appropriate vocabulary, but also to be able to use it in a way that is understandable to another person. Because of these difficulties, this article examines the consequences that arise when different cultural and linguistic systems come into contact, as well as the ways in which even small misunderstandings can lead to more serious problems.

Fig 1. International communication.



Source. Expert Academy (2025).

DEVELOPMENT

There have been a great number of scholars that have attempted to determine what factors contribute to the success or failure of intercultural communication (See Figure 2). Whyte (1977), for instance, discussed how some cultures place a greater emphasis on the context of a sentence than on the words themselves, whereas other cultures prefer to be extremely straightforward. To this day, that fundamental concept continues to explain a great deal. Furthermore, Hofstede (2001) was essential in dissecting the ways in which factors such as authority and individuality influence the manner in which individuals communicate and listen. Thomas (1983) investigated the possibility that even if a person is fluent in a language, they may still fail to communicate effectively if they are not aware of the norms and guidelines that govern some aspects of the culture in which they are immersed. The research conducted by Wierzbicka (2020) went even further, demonstrating how activities that we take for granted, such as expressing regret or offering praises, are carried out differently in various parts of the globe. On top of that, Scollon (2001) said that individuals follow distinct “rules” when they communicate, and that these rules vary based on where they come from. Real-world research lends credence to this assertion. The research conducted by Clyne (1995) revealed significant disparities in the ways in which Germans and English speakers communicate and write in academic contexts. Besides, it was pointed out by Kramsch (2014)

that while learning a language, culture should not be considered an additional component; rather, it should be present at the very core of the process.

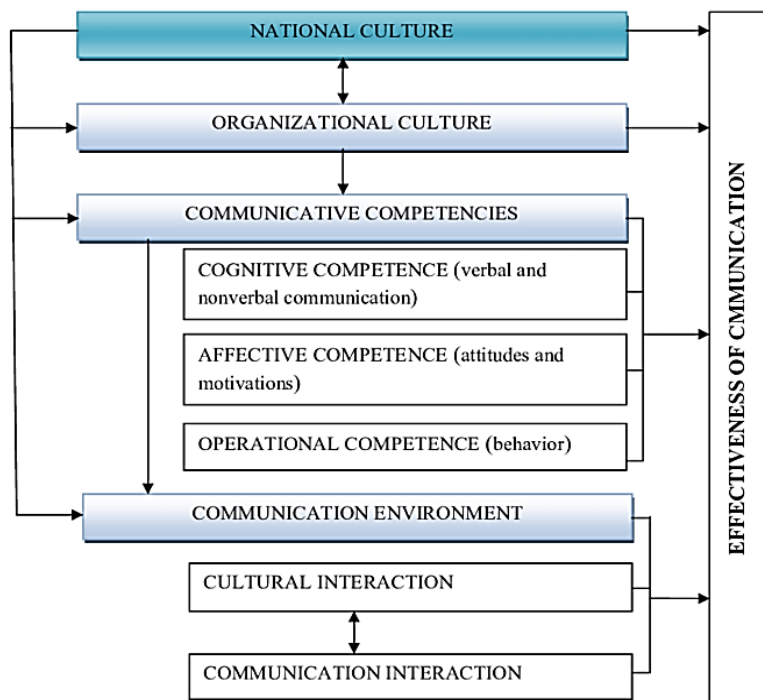
Fig 2. Key to effective intercultural communication.



Source: Faster Capital (2025).

When a number of diverse situations and studies are examined in great detail, a number of distinct patterns emerge. People often misinterpret one another when indirect language is employed, which is a problem that is experienced frequently. It is possible that a sentence that is intended to sound courteous in Japanese might come across as confused in German. On the other hand, a listener from the United States can find something that sounds nice in Arabic to be unclear. According to Figure 3, it is not enough to just acquire new languages in order to comprehend the dynamics of intercultural communication; rather, it is necessary to have a more profound understanding of the ways in which the national, corporate, and individual levels of culture interact with one another (Sułkowski, 2012).

Fig 3. Model of intercultural communication.



Source: Sułkowski (2012).

As the graphic demonstrates, the efficiency of communication is dependent on a complex combination of cognitive, emotional, and operational abilities. It is not only about the words that we speak; it is also about how we think, how we feel, and how we act while we are communicating. In addition to being impacted by the setting in which communication takes place, these competences are formed by wider cultural frameworks. When communicators are aware of these multifaceted aspects, which include linguistic signals, motives, and social conduct, they are better able to adapt to the many cultural situations in which they find themselves. But to put this into effect, it is necessary to acknowledge that communication does not take place in a vacuum in order.

According to Figure 4, the words that individuals from different cultures use when they seek to communicate with one another are not the only thing that matters; it is also about how they think, how they feel, and how they interact with one another in general. Having this list serves as a reminder that there are a number of hurdles that could keep us from really understanding one another. Some of these obstacles include different ideas about silence or time, as well as preconceived notions. Even apparently little elements, like as the closeness of a person during a conversation or the method in which they communicate their sentiments, have the potential to lead to misunderstandings or even arguments if they are not considered and understood appropriately. For us to be successful in overcoming these challenges, it is not sufficient for us to possess language qualities and skills. It is necessary to bring to our notice the cultural assumptions that we have, and we must be open to learn about the perspectives that other people have toward the world. Furthermore, it is possible to develop connections that are stronger and more respectful if one is patient, empathetic, and prepared to listen beyond words (Team English - Examples, 2025).

Fig 4. Barriers and challenges of IC.



Source: Team English - Examples (2025).

Although there will always be obstacles connected with communicating across various cultures, it is possible to establish relationships that are more robust and respectful. Every communication is filtered via the experiences of others, both individually and collectively. As a result, enhancing intercultural communication does not involve simplifying communications; rather, it involves enhancing our awareness of the cultural influences that create the messages. It is only with such understanding that we will be able to achieve relationships that are really successful and courteous across cultures. Not only is it not a quick fix, but it also requires neither a short-term commitment nor a multi-pronged approach in order to be successful in overcoming the difficulties that stand in the way of intercultural communication. When taking into consideration the fact that each of the challenges that have been discussed arises from deeply rooted cultural frameworks, socialization processes, and psychological biases, it is very necessary that solutions go beyond changes that are done at the surface level.

Cultural misinterpretations and stereotyping may be addressed via the use of awareness-based training, which is one way that can be used. It is feasible to minimize the tendency to make assumptions about other people or to

misunderstand them by teaching individuals about common cultural frameworks and the influence such frameworks have on communication patterns. This may be accomplished by educating people about the many cultural frameworks that exist. For instance, it is feasible to aid learners in internalizing the necessity of looking beyond initial impressions by giving them with real-life scenarios in which misunderstandings arise. This may be accomplished by providing learners with realistic situations. Ethnocentrism, which may be described as the notion that one's own culture is superior, is another basic impediment that must be overcome.

A transformation in this perspective can only be brought about via gradual exposure, discourse, and contemplation. This is the only way that this can be accomplished. In addition to being essential tools, programs that promote intercultural communication, diverse team collaborations, and inclusive education are also essential. It is possible to cultivate mutual respect among individuals by teaching them to see cultural differences not as threats but as opportunities for growth and development. When it comes to taking advantage of variations in communication context types, such as high-context vs low-context communication, it is essential to use practical strategies. The clear declaration of expectations, the confirmation of a shared understanding, and the avoidance of assumptions about what is "obvious" are all examples of what this may require for teams that are not from the same country.

Communication professionals who operate in surroundings with low contexts need to be cautious not to mistake indirectness with vagueness. On the other hand, communicators who work in areas with high contexts may benefit from being more precise when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. In spite of the fact that they are often quiet, norms of emotional expression, nonverbal communication, and personal space are quite significant. Both active observation and training that is based on simulation are examples of prospective methods that may be implemented. In the case of professionals who are working in a foreign nation, for instance, it may be advantageous for them to obtain information about the varied ways in which eye contact, gestures, and physical distance are perceived. In spite of the fact that these minute signs are often disregarded, they have the capacity to bring about pain or bewilderment. In addition, the ways in which individuals negotiate and make choices are very different from one culture to the next (cultural differences).

In certain societies, boldness and the ability to make decisions quickly are highly valued, but in other societies, the emphasis is placed on achieving a consensus and engaging in long talks. The establishment of procedures

that are culturally inclusive and that respect both speedy and delayed decision-making processes is important in order to properly address this issue. It is also vital that these procedures be established. It is useful to have clear agendas, written summaries, and procedures that have been agreed upon in order to better align expectations. The deployment of digital literacy training has the potential to reduce instances of technological misuse, such as an excessive reliance on translation software or the usage of communication channels that are not appropriate.

By directing people on whether to use email, video calls, or face-to-face meetings, it is possible to significantly increase the clarity of communication. This is because the preferences of the culture may be taken into consideration while making this decision. In order to address a variety of beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about knowledge that are in conflict with one another, intercultural dialogues and open forums are wonderful methods to use.

People are able to openly express their worldviews without the fear of being condemned when they make use of these platforms, which in turn helps to cultivate an understanding of various belief systems. When beliefs that are in disagreement with one another are valued above those that are common, the focus is often turned from division to collaboration. It is necessary to have sensitivity in order to accurately comprehend silence, differences in temporal perception, and attitudes that are hierarchical. In one culture, silence may be seen as a sign of agreement, whereas in another society, it may be interpreted as a sign of discomfort. To provide a comparable point of comparison, it is possible that punctuality is completely non-negotiable in some regions, while in others it is more flexible.

In order for teams to more easily bridge these gaps, it is essential to establish a common ground and outline expectations throughout the early phases of the process. In the context of multinational businesses, it is impossible to stress the significance of leadership training that emphasizes cultural humility and adaptability. In conclusion, it is essential to keep in mind that the political and economic factors that are associated with the global community should not be underestimated.

There are a number of things that may have an effect on intercultural perspectives. Some of these issues include political instability, economic disparities, and biases distributed by the media. Individuals are unable to solve these challenges on their own; but organizations and lawmakers have the potential to develop intercultural understanding via the adoption of laws that are inclusive, ethical media depiction, and instructional resources that are freely accessible. Learning to live with differences, navigating

through them, and eventually expanding on them is the goal; it is not about removing differences; rather, it is about learning to live with diversity.

To summarize, overcoming the challenges that stand in the way of intercultural communication does not include eliminating distinctions between people of different cultures. We will only be able to transform these challenges into human interactions that are meaningful, respectful, and productive if we make persistent efforts, educate ourselves, and demonstrate empathy for one another.

Then there is the manner in which individuals organize what they say. Some societies place the point at the conclusion of the story, while others place it exactly at the beginning of the story. When a person is really merely adopting a different communication style, this might give the impression that they are confused or even unprepared. Many often, individuals evaluate others harshly because they have the expectation that everyone would adhere to the same norms on how they should speak and write.

The good news is that knowledge can make a significant impact in the situation. People have the ability to alter their behavior and improve their communication skills when they are aware of these discrepancies. Not only does it assist to teach grammar and vocabulary, but it also helps to educate how conversations are conducted in a variety of cultural contexts. Thus, providing students with examples from real life and opportunities to reflect on those examples is an effective way to help them develop actual communication skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Although speak with people from other cultures presents inevitable challenges, these challenges are not insurmountable; on the contrary, they constitute opportunities to enrich our mutual understanding. The root of many misunderstandings lies in the implicit belief that our own communicative style is the “standard” or the only valid form of interaction; this assumption generates distortions in the interpretation of messages and causes unnecessary tensions. In this sense, the literature review shows that language and culture form an inseparable pairing: each linguistic expression carries values, social norms, and conventions specific to a given cultural context, and ignoring either of these two elements leads to partial or erroneous perceptions. Consequently, to improve our interactions, it is essential to develop a dual sensitivity that recognizes both the grammatical and semantic structures of the other language and the cultural frameworks that give it meaning. Recognizing the diversity of ways of speaking—from intonation and register to gestures and

conversational rituals—helps us adjust our messages and more accurately interpret the interlocutor's intentions. By adopting an attitude of active and reflective listening, we are able to reduce communication barriers, avoid hasty judgments, and foster a more authentic and in-depth dialogue. Ultimately, this improvement in communication not only favors the clear transmission of information but also enhances our ability to empathize and respond more appropriately to the needs and expectations of those from cultural backgrounds different from our own.

REFERENCES

- Aljarelah, A. K. (2024). Language and international communication the impact of language on international understanding and diplomatic relations. *The American Journal of Social Science and Education Innovations*, 6(06). <https://doi.org/10.37547/tajssei/Volume06Issue06-23>
- Clyne, M. (1995). *Inter-cultural Communication at Work: Cultural Values in Discourse*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620799>
- Escandon-Barbosa, D., Salas-Paramo, J., & Rialp-Criado, J. (2021). Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions as a Moderator of the Relationship between Ambidextrous Learning and Corporate Sustainability in Born Global Firms. *Sustainability*, 13(13), Article 13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13137344>
- Expert Academy. (2025). *Intercultural Communication & Management*. <https://www.expertacademy.be/en/educations/13115/leadership-management/intercultural-communication-management>
- Faster Capital. (2025). *Intercultural Communication*. <https://fastercapital.com/keyword/intercultural-communication.html/1>
- Hladkoskok, L., Buhinska, T., Botvinko-Botiuik, O., Tytun, O., & Demianenko, O. (2022). Soft Skills formation in professional-oriented foreign language education at higher education institutions. *Revista Eduweb*, 16(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.46502/issn.1856-7576/2022.16.02.14>
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*. SAGE Publications Inc. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/cultures-consequences/book9710>
- Kramsch, C. (2014). Language and Culture. *AILA Review*, 27, 30–55. <https://doi.org/10.1075/aila.27.02kra>
- Liu, X. (2024). Effective Strategies for Cross-Cultural Business Negotiations. *International Journal of Global Economics and Management*, 3(3), 189–199. <https://doi.org/10.62051/ijgem.v3n3.24>

- Scollon, S. (2001). *Intercultural communication: A discourse approach*. https://www.academia.edu/684911/Intercultural_communication_A_discourse_approach
- Siewert, M. (2024). Reflections on Teaching Whorf: Gasoline Drums as a Pedagogical Tool. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 80(4), 477–489. <https://doi.org/10.1086/732458>
- Sułkowski, Ł. (2012). Culture in management from the perspective of cultural discourse in the social sciences. *Journal of Intercultural Management*, 4, 35–49. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Model-of-intercultural-communication_fig1_322251739
- Tamburelli, M. (2021). Taking taxonomy seriously in linguistics: Intelligibility as a criterion of demarcation between languages and dialects. *Lingua*, 256, 103068. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2021.103068>
- Team English - Examples. (2025, January 21). *19+ Barriers & Challenges of Intercultural Communication*. <https://www.examples.com/english/barriers-challenges-of-intercultural-communication.html>
- Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/4.2.91>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2009). *Society and Discourse: How Social Contexts Influence Text and Talk*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511575273>
- Völkel, S., & Nassenstein, N. (Eds.). (2022). Approaches to Language and Culture. *De Gruyter Mouton*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110726626>
- Whyte, M. K. (1977). Review of Political Culture and Group Conflict in Communist China. *Contemporary Sociology*, 6(3), 361–362. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2064842>
- Wierzbicka, A. (2020). *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction*. De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112329764>
- Zhylenko, M. N., & Beresneva, Z. A. (2022). The Languages of Culture: From Theory to Everyday Life Practices. *Vestnik Slavijskikh Kultur-Bulletin of Slavic Cultures-Scientific and Informational Journal*, 63, 107–113. <https://doi.org/10.37816/2073-9567-2022-63-107-113>