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CROSS-CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDING IN GLOBAL COMMUNICATION: PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

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Abstract: *Globalization and digital communication bring people from diverse cultural backgrounds into shared interactional spaces in which English frequently serves as the common medium. Yet a shared language does not guarantee shared understanding, and cross-cultural misunderstanding remains a persistent problem in education, the workplace, and global digital communication. This study aims to examine how the scholarly literature explains the relationship between language, meaning, culture, and cross-cultural misunderstanding from the perspective of the philosophy of language. It employs library research as a qualitative literature review. Data were drawn from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and other academic publications, collected through documentation study and literature searching, with the works of Wittgenstein, Grice, and Searle as foundational references and attention to publications from 2019 to 2024. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, through the identification, categorization, and synthesis of concepts and arguments. The synthesis yielded three themes: meaning depends on cultural context, pragmatic differences are a source of misunderstanding, and meaning is negotiated in global communication. A cross-theme analysis and an illustrative case then apply the three lenses jointly. The review shows that meaning is not universal but is formed within social practices, so that the clarity of a message depends on the extent to which speakers share the rules governing the use of language. Theoretically, the study offers a conceptual synthesis that brings the philosophy of language into dialogue with intercultural pragmatics; practically, it is relevant to developing intercultural communicative competence in education, international organizations, and digital environments.*
Keywords: *Philosophy Of Language; Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding; Language Games; Implicature; Speech Acts; Library Research.*

INTRODUCTION

For many people who study, work, and socialize across national boundaries, being misunderstood is rarely a matter of unknown words. It is more often the unsettling discovery that words everyone knows have been heard in a way the speaker never intended. A remark offered as help is received as an affront; an explanation that feels complete to the speaker leaves the listener with a different picture. Seen from the standpoint of those who live through such moments, cross-cultural misunderstanding appears less as a technical failure of language than as an encounter between two ways of making sense of what is said.

Technological change has made such encounters routine. Digital platforms, international study programs, and multicultural workplaces now place people from different countries, cultures, and value systems in the same communicative space, and English frequently serves as the shared medium. In multilingual societies such as Indonesia, where English is mostly learned as a foreign language yet increasingly used for international study, work, and online interaction, the question of what happens when a shared language meets unshared assumptions has become practically pressing

rather than merely theoretical. Digital media can intensify the problem because they often remove the contextual and nonverbal cues on which interpretation relies; the contrast between high-context and low-context communication proposed by Hall (1976) remains a useful, if necessarily simplified, way of seeing why this matters. The misunderstandings that result concern not only vocabulary and grammar but also norms of politeness, expectations about directness, and the assumptions that give an utterance its point.

Research on intercultural communication since 2019 has produced rich accounts of how meaning is handled when interlocutors do not share a full set of background assumptions. Kecskes (2019a) examines English as a lingua franca from a pragmatic perspective, and the Cambridge Handbook of Intercultural Pragmatics (Kecskes, 2022) surveys the field and notes that, in intercultural interaction, interlocutors have limited core common ground and therefore depend more heavily on emergent common ground built during the exchange itself. A further edited volume (Kecskes, 2023) re-examines the notion of common ground in light of both first-language and intercultural interaction, and journal studies analyze how such common ground is built in particular encounters, such as first meetings (Kecskes, 2019b) and EFL classrooms (Ortaçtepe Hart & Okkalı, 2021). Ye (2024) turns to Wittgenstein's notion of the language game as an intellectual foundation for cross-cultural communication competence in college English education.

These contributions are valuable, yet they leave a space that the present study addresses. Work in intercultural pragmatics tends to theorize common ground or to analyze particular interactions as they unfold, while the philosophical contribution reviewed here is oriented toward pedagogy. Less attention has been given to bringing the core concepts of the philosophy of language, namely meaning as use, implicature, and speech acts, together with intercultural pragmatics research into a single, integrated conceptual account of why misunderstanding arises across cultures and how it is overcome. Philosophy of language is therefore treated here not only as a body of theory to be applied, but as a resource for synthesizing and interpreting the existing scholarship.

Accordingly, this study aims (1) to examine how the scholarly literature explains the dependence of meaning on cultural context; (2) to synthesize, from the perspective of the philosophy of language, how differences in pragmatic conventions give rise to cross-cultural misunderstanding; and (3) to describe how the literature accounts for the negotiation of meaning in restoring shared understanding. The scope is limited to conceptual and theoretical scholarship on language, meaning, culture, and misunderstanding in global, English-mediated communication. Theoretically, the study contributes a conceptual synthesis that connects the philosophy of language with intercultural pragmatics; practically, it informs the development of intercultural communicative competence in education, organizations, and digital communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To frame the review, this study draws on three philosophical lenses, namely Wittgenstein's language games, Grice's conversational implicature, and Searle's speech act theory, and places them in dialogue with recent work in intercultural pragmatics. The theories are used not as definitions to be listed but as analytic tools for explaining why meaning so often breaks down when speakers from different cultural backgrounds communicate.

1. Language Games: Wittgenstein

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1953) shifts attention from what words stand for to how they are used. Meaning, on this view, is found in use within activities he calls language games, which are in turn embedded in broader forms of life. A competent speaker knows a word not by holding a definition but by mastering a practice: what counts as a criticism, a greeting, or a polite refusal is settled by the shared habits of a community. Applied to cross-cultural communication, the idea carries a sobering implication. Two people may pronounce the same sentence correctly and still be playing different games with it. The discomfort of misunderstanding is then the discomfort of discovering that rules one had treated as natural are local. Ye (2024) draws on this insight to argue that language education should attend to the impact of cultural variance on linguistic interaction. Here the same insight serves as the primary analytic tool for reading the literature on cross-cultural misunderstanding.

2. Conversational Implicature: Grice

Grice (1989) distinguishes what is said from what is meant. Speakers routinely communicate more than their words literally express, and hearers recover this surplus by reasoning on the assumption that the speaker is cooperative and is observing the conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Implicature thus explains how a hint, an understatement, or an indirect criticism can succeed. It also explains how it can fail: the inference works only if speaker and hearer share enough background to calculate the same intended meaning. In cross-cultural exchanges that background cannot be presumed, which is why intercultural pragmatics, while revising rather than abandoning Gricean notions, stresses that common ground often has to be built rather than assumed (Kecskes, 2019b, 2022). For the purposes of this review, the Gricean lens makes visible the usually invisible work of inference and the conditions under which it fails.

3. Speech Act Theory: Searle

Searle (1969) treats speaking as rule-governed action. To say something is to perform an act, such as requesting, commanding, promising, refusing, or criticizing, and the success of that act depends on conditions that speakers and hearers must recognize as being in force. What counts as an offer of help, or as a threat to someone's standing, is therefore a matter of convention rather than of words alone. When conventions diverge across cultures, the same utterance may count as one act for the speaker and another for the hearer, with consequences that are social and emotional as well as semantic: offense, embarrassment, withdrawal. The speech act lens directs attention to what speakers take their words to have *done*, and to how others may take them to have done something else.

4. Comparing the Approaches and Choosing a Primary Lens

Placed side by side, the three perspectives illuminate different layers of one problem. Grice's account explains the inferential mechanism by which unstated meaning is recovered, but it presupposes a degree of shared background and shared expectations of cooperation that cross-cultural settings cannot guarantee. Searle's account explains the action performed by an utterance, yet it relies on conventions whose application is itself culturally variable. Wittgenstein's account addresses precisely this dependence: it asks where conventions and shared background come from, and locates them in the practices of a community. This study therefore adopts language games as its primary analytical lens, with implicature and speech acts serving

as complementary tools for examining, respectively, the inferential and the performative dimensions of misunderstanding.

The rationale is epistemological. The aim of this review is not to test which theory best predicts misunderstanding, but to synthesize how the literature explains the way meaning is constructed, interpreted, and negotiated across cultures, and for that purpose a perspective that locates meaning in social practice is the most fitting. Hall's (1976) context distinction and wider theorizing in intercultural communication (Gudykunst, 2005) are treated as orienting resources rather than explanatory frameworks, in order to avoid treating cultures as uniform blocks.

5. Conceptual Framework

Guided by this positioning, the study treats misunderstanding not as a simple error of language but as an event in which differing language games meet. The reviewed literature is read through three analytic questions. How does the literature explain the dependence of meaning on cultural context? How does it account for the gap between what a speaker intends and what a hearer understands? How does it describe the ways in which interlocutors negotiate meaning to reach shared understanding? These questions correspond to the three themes of the synthesis presented below.

An illustrative case clarifies the orientation. Consider a remark intended as constructive criticism that is received as impolite. Such a case is not read as a failure of vocabulary but as a collision between two ways of performing and receiving the act of criticizing, in which intention, convention, and social meaning are all at stake. Theory thus functions as a reflective lens for organizing and interpreting the literature rather than as a template to be confirmed.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Research Design

This study employs library research (*kajian pustaka*), conducted as a qualitative literature review (Zed, 2004; Snyder, 2019). Library research treats written sources as the primary data, which is appropriate when the aim is conceptual: to examine and synthesize how existing scholarship explains a phenomenon, rather than to collect new empirical data from people. Because the focus of this study is the relationship between language, meaning, culture, and cross-cultural misunderstanding as theorized in the philosophy of language and intercultural pragmatics, a literature-based design allows theoretical positions to be compared and integrated systematically. The study involves no human subjects and no fieldwork.

2. Data Sources

Data were collected through a focused review of academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and other scholarly publications related to philosophy of language, intercultural communication, pragmatics, and cross-cultural misunderstanding. The sources were selected based on their relevance to the research topic, credibility, and theoretical contribution. Particular attention was given to recent studies published between 2019 and 2024, while seminal works by Wittgenstein, Grice, and Searle were included as foundational references.

3. Data Collection Technique

Data were gathered through documentation study and literature searching. Sources were identified by topic (philosophy of language, intercultural communication, pragmatics, and cross-cultural misunderstanding) and screened

against four criteria: topical relevance, credibility of the publisher or journal, theoretical contribution, and, for contemporary scholarship, recency (publication between 2019 and 2024). Selected sources were read closely, and passages relevant to meaning, culture, and misunderstanding were recorded in notes together with their bibliographic details so that every claim could be traced to its source.

4. Data Analysis

The collected literature was analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Relevant concepts, theories, arguments, and research findings were identified and categorized according to recurring themes. The analysis focused on how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and negotiated in intercultural communication. Through a process of comparison and synthesis, the selected literature was examined to explain the relationship between language, culture, and cross-cultural misunderstanding from a philosophy of language perspective.

Procedurally, the analysis proceeded in five steps: (1) repeated reading of the selected sources; (2) identification of relevant concepts, arguments, and findings as units of analysis; (3) categorization of these units into recurring themes; (4) comparison of how different sources treat each theme, noting convergence, tension, and gaps; and (5) interpretation of the resulting themes through the lenses of language games, implicature, and speech acts.

Beyond the thematic synthesis, the analysis included two further steps. First, a cross-theme comparison examined each theme through each of the three lenses. Second, a constructed illustrative case was analyzed through the same lenses to show how they work together. The constructed case is an analytical device and not empirical data.

5. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was approached through the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), adapted to document-based research. Credibility was supported by relying on scholarly publications and by drawing on sources from different traditions within philosophy of language and intercultural pragmatics. Dependability and confirmability were supported by documenting the selection criteria and analytic steps and by citing every claim to its source, so that the path from literature to interpretation can be traced. Transferability is addressed by stating the scope of the review explicitly, with the caution that the synthesis is conceptual and not an empirical generalization.

6. Ethical Considerations

Because the study uses published sources only, informed consent was not required; ethical responsibility lies in academic integrity, namely accurate representation of sources, proper attribution, and avoidance of plagiarism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of the literature produced three themes. They are interrelated rather than separate: together they trace a movement from the recognition that meaning depends on cultural context, through the identification of pragmatic differences as a main source of misunderstanding, to the account of how interlocutors negotiate meaning to restore shared understanding.

1. Theme 1: Meaning Depends on Cultural Context

The reviewed literature consistently indicates that meaning is closely connected to cultural context. Although individuals may use the same language, differences in cultural background often influence how messages are interpreted. This supports Wittgenstein's (1953) view that meaning emerges through language use within particular social practices.

Recent work extends this view to cross-cultural communication. Ye (2024), drawing on the notion of the language game, observes that interlocutors in cross-cultural discourse come from diverse cultural milieus and that their linguistic expressions and communicative practices are shaped by their respective cultural norms. Hall's (1976) distinction between high-context and low-context communication similarly directs attention to how much of a message is carried by shared background rather than by words. In intercultural pragmatics, the same concern appears as the notion of core common ground, the knowledge, conventions, and norms shared within a speech community, which is limited when speakers come from different communities (Kecskes, 2019b, 2022).

The synthesis also reveals a tension. While the literature stresses cultural context, it also cautions, explicitly or implicitly, against treating cultures as uniform. As noted above, Hall's distinction is a simplification, and the emphasis in intercultural pragmatics on emergent common ground implies that interlocutors are not merely carriers of cultural rules but active builders of understanding in the course of interaction (Kecskes, 2022). Cultural context, then, shapes meaning without fully determining it. If meaning depends on context in this way, the next question is where the resulting differences become most visible: in the pragmatic conventions of everyday utterance.

2. Theme 2: Pragmatic Differences as a Source of Misunderstanding

The literature reviewed highlights that pragmatic differences contribute significantly to cross-cultural misunderstanding. Variations in politeness strategies, indirectness, and conversational expectations often result in differing interpretations of the same utterance.

Two classic frameworks explain why. In Grice's (1989) account, implicature succeeds only when speaker and hearer share the background assumptions from which the intended meaning can be calculated; where that background differs, the inference may be drawn differently or not at all. In Searle's (1969) account, the identity of a speech act depends on conventions recognized by both parties; where conventions differ, one utterance can count as two different acts. Intercultural pragmatics situates these notions, together with presuppositions, context, and common ground, as central objects of inquiry in its own right (Kecskes, 2022, 2023), and treats the limited shared ground between speakers of different backgrounds as a defining feature of intercultural interaction (Kecskes, 2019b).

A paradox emerges from this synthesis. Indirectness and implicit meaning make communication efficient among those who share much background, yet the same features make it fragile among those who do not: the more an utterance relies on what is left unsaid, the more it depends on what speakers hold in common. Misunderstanding is therefore not the opposite of competent communication but a side effect of its economy. This raises the question of what interlocutors can do once the gap is noticed, which is the concern of the third theme.

3. Theme 3: Negotiation of Meaning in Global Communication

The literature suggests that successful intercultural communication frequently involves negotiation of meaning. Clarification, adaptation, and contextual explanation enable communicators from different cultural backgrounds to achieve mutual understanding despite differing linguistic and cultural norms.

This theme is closely tied to the intercultural pragmatics account of emergent common ground, in which speakers who lack extensive shared knowledge rely more on common ground that is constructed in the course of the interaction (Kecskes, 2019b, 2022, 2023). Kecskes (2019b), for instance, shows that in intercultural first encounters the cultural frame of the target language is broken up and replaced by an emergent frame that interlocutors co-construct from their prior experience with their first language, their limited experience of the target culture, and the actual situation. Work on EFL classrooms points in the same direction: Ortaçtepe Hart and Okkalı (2021) show that teachers and students constantly negotiate common ground and positionings, and that common ground is built differently by teachers who share their students' background and by those who do not. On the philosophical side, the Wittgensteinian perspective implies that understanding across cultures requires learning another's language game and not merely translating words, a point reflected in Ye's (2024) emphasis on fostering learners' adaptability to different linguistic registers and situational contexts.

The synthesis leaves an ambiguity open. Negotiation presupposes time, goodwill, and a willingness to expose one's own uncertainty, and the sources reviewed here do not settle who bears the burden of negotiation when interlocutors are unequal in language proficiency or status. Negotiation is thus presented as an achievement that is possible and productive, but not guaranteed or equally costly for all. What the literature does show is that meaning, in intercultural communication, is something achieved between people rather than transmitted from one to another.

4. Summary of Themes

Main Theme	Key Sources	Synthesis
Meaning depends on cultural context	Wittgenstein (1953); Hall (1976); Kecskes (2019b, 2022); Ye (2024)	Meaning arises from use within social practices; cultural context shapes but does not fully determine interpretation
Pragmatic differences as a source of misunderstanding	Grice (1989); Searle (1969); Kecskes (2019b, 2022, 2023)	Implicature and speech acts rely on shared background and conventions; differences in these produce divergent interpretations
Negotiation of meaning in global communication	Kecskes (2019b, 2022, 2023); Ortaçtepe Hart & Okkalı (2021); Wittgenstein (1953); Ye (2024)	Clarification and adaptation build emergent common ground; shared understanding is achieved between interlocutors

5. Transition of Meaning across Themes

The three themes form a connected line of argument. The recognition that meaning depends on cultural context (Theme 1) explains why pragmatic conventions differ and why those differences generate misunderstanding (Theme 2), which in turn makes the negotiation of meaning necessary and gives it its character (Theme 3). Across the literature, communication across cultures is not a linear passage from utterance to meaning but a space of negotiation between intention, convention, and

social expectation.

6. Cross-Theme Analysis through the Three Lenses

The three themes can be analyzed further by asking how each philosophical lens accounts for each theme. The table below sets out this cross-theme analysis. The comparison is analytical: it organizes claims already drawn from the reviewed sources and introduces no new data.

Lens	Theme 1: Meaning depends on cultural context	Theme 2: Pragmatic differences	Theme 3: Negotiation of meaning
Language games (Wittgenstein)	Meaning lies in use within the practices of a community, so cultural context supplies the rules of use.	Divergent rules of use lead the same utterance to function differently for speaker and hearer.	Negotiation constructs a small, shared language game between particular interlocutors.
Conversational implicature (Grice)	The background needed to calculate an intended meaning is distributed differently across cultures.	Inference fails when speaker and hearer do not share the background assumed by the speaker.	Clarification rebuilds the background on which inferences depend.
Speech acts (Searle)	The conventions that make an utterance a particular act vary across cultures.	One utterance may count as one act for the speaker and another act for the hearer.	Checking and explaining settle which act is being performed.

Read across the rows, the lenses are not rivals but address different layers of the same problem. The language games lens explains where the rules of use come from, namely the practices of a community. The implicature lens explains the inferential route by which unstated meaning is recovered, and how that route fails when the background differs. The speech act lens explains what an utterance is taken to do, and why a mismatch of conventions can change the act itself. Read down the columns, each theme is illuminated by all three lenses, yet none is exhausted by a single one. Negotiation, for example, is at once a way of rebuilding the background for inference, a way of settling which act is being performed, and a way of constructing a local language game.

Two analytical consequences follow. First, misunderstanding can arise at more than one layer, so that the remedy should match the layer: more explicitness where inference fails, closer attention to the force of the act where conventions differ, and the patient construction of shared practice where the rules of use themselves differ. Second, the layers interact. A divergence in rules of use may produce both an inferential mismatch and a mismatch of acts, which is why a single clarification can repair one layer while leaving another untouched.

7. An Illustrative Analytical Case

To show how the lenses work together, this section analyzes a constructed case. The case is hypothetical and was devised for analytical purposes. It is not drawn from field data and should not be read as an empirical finding. It builds on the example of constructive criticism introduced in Section 2.5.

Suppose that a student from one cultural background tells a project partner from another, “This part of your draft does not work.” The speaker intends constructive

criticism, offered as help toward a better draft. The partner, however, receives the remark as a blunt personal rebuke. The conversation continues awkwardly, and the partner withdraws from the discussion.

From the standpoint of language games, the two interlocutors follow different rules of use for the practice of giving feedback. For the speaker, direct comment on a text is a normal and even respectful move in collaboration. For the partner, the same move may belong to a different kind of relationship, or may ordinarily be accompanied by softening that was absent here. Neither is mistaken within their own practice; the misunderstanding arises where the two practices meet (Wittgenstein, 1953; Ye, 2024).

From the standpoint of implicature, the speaker assumes that nothing beyond the literal assessment needs to be conveyed, whereas the partner may search for an implied message about their ability or effort. Reasoning on the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative and relevant, the partner may treat the bluntness itself as meaningful (Grice, 1989). Because the background that would allow both to calculate the same implicature is not shared, the inferences diverge.

From the standpoint of speech acts, the utterance counts as an act of criticism for both parties, but the conditions that distinguish helpful criticism from face-threatening criticism are conventions that are not equally in force for them (Searle, 1969). The speaker performs an act of help; the hearer recognizes an affront.

Negotiation offers a way out. If the speaker asks whether the remark was understood as intended, and the partner explains how it sounded, the two begin to build emergent common ground (Kecskes, 2019b, 2022). The speaker learns that feedback in this partnership needs framing or softening, and the partner learns that the comment was meant as help. In Wittgensteinian terms, they have made a small, shared language game for giving feedback.

The case illustrates the cross-theme analysis in miniature. A single exchange can display a mismatch of rules of use, an inferential divergence, and a clash of speech act conventions at once, and its repair requires attention to all three. Its limits should also be stated. Because it is constructed, it cannot show how often such misunderstandings occur or how people actually experience them; those questions call for the empirical studies suggested in the Conclusion.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how the scholarly literature explains the relationship between language, meaning, culture, and cross-cultural misunderstanding. Its synthesis yields three principal conclusions: meaning shifts with the cultural context in which an utterance is produced and received; pragmatic differences are a major source of the gap between what is intended and what is understood; and shared understanding, when achieved, is negotiated. Taken together, they suggest that cross-cultural misunderstanding is not adequately explained as a shortage of linguistic competence. The discussion below considers what these conclusions mean and what they add to existing understanding.

1. Meaning as Use: When Language Games Become Visible

Read through Wittgenstein's (1953) concept, cross-cultural misunderstanding is an encounter between language games. Ordinarily, rules of use are followed without being noticed; only when another person plays by different rules does a rule appear as a rule. Misunderstanding, in this light, is the moment at which a language game becomes visible to those inside it. This is consistent with Ye (2024), who points to the impact of cultural variance on linguistic interaction as something language education

should take seriously, and it enriches that argument by connecting it with the intercultural pragmatics notion of limited core common ground (Kecskes, 2019b, 2022). Hall's (1976) distinction offers a parallel, but the synthesis cautions against using it as a simple sorting of cultures. What matters is the specific act being performed and the norms attached to it, not a general cultural type.

2. The Gap between Intention and Interpretation: Implicature and Speech Acts

Gricean and Searlean accounts explain the gap between intention and interpretation in complementary ways. For Grice (1989), the difficulty lies in inference: the speaker designs an utterance on the assumption that the hearer will draw the intended implicatures from shared expectations, and when those expectations differ, implicatures do not travel. For Searle (1969), the difficulty may lie instead in which act is recognized, since the conventions that make an utterance a request, a criticism, or an offer are not equally in force everywhere. The two readings point toward different remedies, more explicitness in the first case and closer attention to the force of the act in the second, and the literature reviewed does not claim that one replaces the other. Seen from the philosophy of language, the apparent paradox of the second theme is explained: efficiency within shared ground and fragility across it are two faces of the same dependence on common background.

3. Negotiating Meaning: Building Common Ground

The negotiation of meaning resonates with accounts in intercultural pragmatics in which, with limited core common ground, interlocutors rely on emergent common ground built through the interaction itself (Kecskes, 2019b, 2022, 2023). The present synthesis adds a philosophical reading of this process. From a Wittgensteinian standpoint, negotiation is more than the repair of a communication channel. It is the gradual construction of a small, shared language game between particular interlocutors, with rules that did not exist before they began to talk. This reading also explains why clarification and adaptation are so often emphasized: they are the practical means by which two language games are made to overlap.

4. Misunderstanding, Identity, and Social Positioning

A common view treats misunderstanding as a breakdown to be eliminated. The synthesis invites an alternative: misunderstanding as a moment of disclosure, in which hidden norms become visible and a shared practice can begin to be built. This view should not be romanticized. Because speech acts have social consequences, a remark misread as an affront can threaten a speaker's standing as a considerate interlocutor. Positioning is also part of the process: in the EFL classrooms studied by Ortaçtepe Hart and Okkalı (2021), building common ground went hand in hand with positioning oneself as an insider or an outsider. As the third theme indicates, the burden of negotiation is unlikely to fall evenly on all parties. Whose norms become the default in English-mediated settings is a further question that the reviewed literature raises but does not resolve, and it may be especially significant for people communicating in a language that is not their first.

5. Convergence and Divergence among the Lenses

The cross-theme analysis in Section 4.6 shows both convergence and divergence among the three lenses. They converge on a central point: meaning is not carried by words alone but depends on background that interlocutors may or may not share. Grice's account depends on shared background for calculating implicatures, Searle's on conventions that make an act the act it is, and Wittgenstein's on the practices that give words their use. Intercultural pragmatics reaches a similar point by a different

route when it emphasizes limited core common ground and the importance of emergent common ground (Kecskes, 2019b, 2022).

The lenses diverge on where the difficulty is located. For Wittgenstein it lies in the practice, for Grice in the inference, and for Searle in the act. Each also leaves something unexplained when taken alone. The language games lens says little about the specific mechanism by which a particular utterance is misread. The implicature lens presupposes a degree of cooperation and shared expectation that cross-cultural settings cannot guarantee. The speech act lens takes conventions as given and is less able to explain how they change when interlocutors negotiate. Using the lenses together, with language games as the primary frame, compensates for these limits without pretending that they have been resolved.

This analysis also clarifies why intercultural pragmatics has revised rather than abandoned Gricean notions. The revision does not reject inference or cooperation; it adds the observation that, where core common ground is limited, interlocutors must build the ground on which inference depends (Kecskes, 2019b, 2022).

6. Reflection on the Authors' Position

The interpretation offered here is shaped by the lenses and sources chosen. Wittgenstein, Grice, and Searle wrote within Anglophone and European philosophical traditions, so the concepts used to organize the literature are themselves products of particular language games. The selection of sources, although guided by explicit criteria, reflects the authors' judgment and the scholarship accessible to them, and the thematic synthesis is an interpretation rather than a neutral summary. These choices have been made visible in the methods so that readers can assess them.

7. Conceptual Contributions

Conceptually, the study offers three contributions. First, it brings the philosophy of language into structured dialogue with intercultural pragmatics, showing how abstract notions such as language games, implicature, and speech acts illuminate the findings and concepts of recent scholarship on cross-cultural communication. Second, it reframes clarity as relational rather than as a property of messages: a message is clear only relative to the language game in which it is received. Third, it presents negotiation of meaning as the construction of local, shared language games rather than as mere repair. Together these contributions reinforce the view that the use of language cannot be separated from the social practices that surround it.

CONCLUSION

This study shows, through a qualitative literature review, that cross-cultural misunderstanding in global communication cannot be reduced to a matter of vocabulary or grammar. It arises where meaning, intention, and social expectation come apart, and where speakers must work to put them back together. Three patterns of meaning organize the literature: meaning depends on cultural context; pragmatic differences in implicature and speech acts are a major source of misunderstanding; and understanding, when it comes, is negotiated rather than simply received. The cross-theme analysis further shows that the three lenses address different layers of the same problem, namely practice, inference, and act.

The fresh perspective that emerges is that misunderstanding can be read as a moment of disclosure rather than only as failure, a moment at which the rules of one's own language game become visible and a shared one can begin to be built. Conceptually, this strengthens the philosophy of language's claim that meaning is not

universal but arises from social practice, and it connects that claim with the intercultural pragmatics account of emergent common ground. Practically, it indicates that communicative competence across cultures involves more than knowing a language; it involves awareness that one's own norms of use are local.

Several implications follow. For policymakers in higher education and international organizations, the synthesis suggests that preparation for international settings should include attention to communicative norms and not only language proficiency. For curriculum developers and instructors, intercultural communication teaching can make language games, implicature, and the variable force of speech acts explicit topics, and can practice routines of clarification that treat checking understanding as normal rather than as a sign of weakness. For digital literacy, the synthesis underlines that online exchanges, where contextual cues are scarce, call for particular care in confirming how messages have been received.

The study has limitations. As library research, it rests on published sources and generates no empirical data on how people actually experience or resolve misunderstanding. The number of recent journal articles reviewed is limited, the sources are predominantly in English, and the thematic synthesis reflects the authors' interpretation. Questions left open in the analysis, such as how the burden of negotiation is distributed and whose norms become the default, mark the edge of what a literature-based design can establish. The illustrative case is constructed and therefore serves analysis only; it is not evidence of how often or how people actually experience misunderstanding.

Future research could test and refine the synthesis empirically, for example through phenomenological interviews that examine how individuals experience cross-cultural misunderstanding, ethnographic observation of intercultural interaction, or close analysis of digital conversations. Systematic literature reviews with explicit database protocols and sources in more languages could also broaden the evidence base. Such work would extend the dialogue between the philosophy of language and the study of intercultural communication that this study has begun.

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