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English as A Lingua Franca in Tourism: A Case-Based Analysis of Communication Breakdowns and Service Recovery in Tourist Encounters

Taufiq Kurniawan¹, Satria Agust^{2*}, Valentina Dyah Arum Sari³, Titi Lestari⁴,
Glenie Latuni⁵

Manado State University, Indonesia^{1,5}

Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, Indonesia²

Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE), Hungary¹

Universitas Mercu Buana Yogyakarta, Indonesia³

Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa University, Indonesia⁴

ABSTRACT: *English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) plays a vital role in global tourism, facilitating communication between international tourists and service providers, yet it often causes miscommunication due to differing proficiency levels, accents, and cultural norms. Such breakdowns can lead to service failures, underscoring the need for effective recovery. This qualitative case study explores ELF interactions in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tour operations across three destinations in Lombok, Indonesia. Data from observations, recordings, interviews, and complaint documents were analyzed using discourse and thematic methods. Four main breakdowns emerged: lexical misunderstandings, pronunciation issues, pragmatic failures and cultural mismatches, where lexical and pragmatic misunderstandings were most frequent. Recovery strategies included clarification, apology, nonverbal support, compensation, and proactive adjustment, with cultural expectations mediating success. Relational and proactive approaches yielded the greatest satisfaction. The study integrates ELF service recovery theory and highlights practical training in cross-cultural pragmatics and flexible recovery to improve multilingual service quality.*

Keywords: ELF, tourism communication, service recovery, cross-cultural pragmatics, communication breakdowns.

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INTRODUCTION

English has emerged as the most widely used medium of communication in international tourism, functioning as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) that enables interactions between service providers and tourists from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Elder & Davies, 2006; Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2011). Lee et al. (2023) stated that in tourism encounters, where clear and effective communication is central to service quality, ELF often serves as a bridge across multilingual contexts. However, because tourists and service providers frequently bring different levels of English proficiency and cultural norms to these exchanges, miscommunication is common. When such breakdowns occur, service providers, as suggested by Zhang (2010) and Komunda and Osarenkhoe (2012), are expected to engage in service recovery strategies that not only resolve the immediate issue but also restore customer satisfaction and protect organizational reputation. Despite the importance of this process, limited scholarly attention, such as Trang and Phuong (2023), Aman et al. (2024) and Mavrin (2024), has been given to the intersection between ELF communication and service recovery in tourism.

While the role of English as a *lingua franca* has been extensively studied in educational and intercultural communication (Hult, 2017; Knapp, 2015), its implications in tourism interactions remain comparatively underdeveloped. Unlike classroom or professional settings, tourists, as described by Sharma (2020), encounter situations that are often spontaneous, brief, and transactional, which increases the likelihood of misunderstandings and limits the opportunities for clarifications or negotiation of meaning. These characteristics highlight the need for more context-specific investigations into how ELF operates in tourism and how miscommunication affects both the tourist experience and the service provider's ability to deliver quality service.

Research on service recovery in tourism has paid limited attention to ELF, with most studies (Albl-mikasa, 2010; Irgin, 2025; Zhunussova et al., 2023) focusing on native-English or local-language contexts and overlooking the impact of ELF on recovery outcomes. Real-world miscommunication in tourism encounters also remains unexplored, as much of the existing work relies on simulated or hypothetical scenarios rather than authentic tourist-service provider interactions. Moreover, prior research by Koc (2019) often treats communication and hospitality management as separate domains, analyzing miscommunication types or service recovery strategies in isolation, which leads to a fragmented understanding. Cultural and pragmatic factors, as proven by Sperti (2019), are also insufficiently addressed, with little consideration of how cross-cultural pragmatics shape the effectiveness of recovery strategies in ELF settings. Finally, current models for service recovery, such as Vourloumi (2025) and Koc (2018), are largely adapted from general business frameworks and fail to provide tourism-specific approaches that reflect the unique challenges of multilingual, multicultural environments.

Furthermore, the service recovery literature in tourism has traditionally emphasized managerial and procedural aspects, such as compensation, complaint

handling, and organizational policies (Mir et al., 2023), while paying less attention to the communicative dimension through which recovery is enacted. However, in ELF contexts, Mair et al. (2014) proposed that the success of recovery efforts often hinges not merely on what is offered to dissatisfied tourists but also on how these offers are communicated across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This, by Anggayana (2023), suggests that a comprehensive understanding of service recovery in tourism requires an integration of insights from applied linguistics, pragmatics, and hospitality management. By situating service recovery within real-life ELF interactions, this study aims to fill this interdisciplinary gap and contribute both theoretically and practically to the improvement of tourism communication strategies.

Tourism, as explained by Lee et al. (2023), relies heavily on ELF to facilitate communication between service providers and international tourists, yet communication breakdowns are frequent, and the effectiveness of recovery strategies in such multilingual and multicultural contexts remains unexplored, particularly through authentic, case-based evidence. Although this study is situated in tourism contexts, its implications extend beyond leisure travel. International students and other mobile populations similarly navigate service encounters in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) when accessing housing offices, healthcare services, banking institutions and university administrative units. Like tourists, they often engage in brief, transactional interactions shaped by differing linguistic proficiencies and cultural expectations. Miscommunication in these contexts can affect well-being, integration and institutional trust. By examining how communication breakdowns are repaired in multilingual tourism settings, this study offers transferable insights for understanding how ELF mediates service encounters in broader international mobility contexts, including higher education environments.

This study therefore seeks to address the following questions: (1) what types of communication breakdowns occur in tourist-service provider interactions when ELF is used, (2) what strategies are employed by tourism businesses to recover from such breakdowns, (3) how effective are these strategies in restoring customer satisfaction and maintaining service quality, (4) what linguistic, cultural, and contextual factors influence the success or failure of service recovery, and (5) how can linguistic analysis be integrated with service recovery theory to improve communication outcomes in tourism. To achieve this, the research aims to identify and categorize common types of miscommunication in ELF tourist-service provider interactions, document and analyze the recovery strategies employed by tourism staff, assess the effectiveness of these strategies in resolving issues and restoring tourist satisfaction, explore the role of cultural and pragmatic factors in shaping both miscommunication and recovery processes, and ultimately synthesize existing ELF and service recovery perspectives into an applied analytical framework for managing communication breakdowns and service recovery in ELF tourism contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Global Communication

English has become the primary medium of international interaction, serving as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in multilingual encounters where speakers often have varying degrees of proficiency (Mauranen, 2018). Research in applied linguistics has examined ELF in educational, business, and intercultural contexts, showing that its use often involves negotiation of meaning, accommodation, and pragmatic adjustments rather than strict adherence to native-speaker norms (Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018). These studies highlight ELF as a dynamic, adaptive and functional tool that prioritizes mutual understanding over grammatical accuracy. While this body of work has provided valuable insights into ELF as a global communication resource, its application in tourism settings – where interactions are typically brief, spontaneous, and transactional – has received less attention. Unlike academic or workplace ELF, tourism ELF requires service providers to balance linguistic clarity with hospitality, often under time pressure and across cultural boundaries (Thongphut & Kaur, 2023).

ELF in tourism encounters

Tourism has been identified as one of the industries most reliant on ELF, as it connects service providers with a diverse and international clientele (Lee et al., 2023). Previous studies of tourism communication have documented the multilingual realities of service encounters, showing that ELF often serves as the ‘default’ code when no shared local language exists (Kell et al., 2016; Schaller-Schwaner, 2015). However, the spontaneity of tourist-service provider exchanges increases the likelihood of miscommunication, particularly in contexts where both parties lack advanced proficiency or share little cultural common ground. Misunderstandings may stem from lexical gaps, pronunciation differences, pragmatic failures, or culturally distinct expectations of politeness and service norms (Al-Seghayer, 2024). Despite the recognition of these challenges, most ELF tourism research has concentrated on general communication practices rather than systematically analyzing how breakdowns are handled and how recovery strategies affect service outcomes.

Communication breakdowns in ELF interactions

Miscommunication in ELF has been widely discussed in the literature, with studies noting that breakdowns are not only linguistic but also pragmatic and cultural (Cavalheiro, 2015; Kaur, 2011; Pietikäinen, 2018). In tourism, breakdowns may arise when tourists and staff interpret speech acts differently, such as requests, apologies, or offers of assistance. Pragmatic failures – for example, misinterpretations of politeness strategies or tone – can escalate into dissatisfaction if not managed effectively (Mulken, 2024). However, research on communication breakdowns in tourism has largely relied on simulated dialogs or classroom-based data, with few studies capturing naturally occurring interactions (Hsu et al., 2025). This lack of authentic, case-based evidence leaves a significant gap in understanding the real dynamics of communication in ELF tourism

contexts, particularly how frontline staff respond to and repair breakdowns in real time.

Service recovery in tourism

Service recovery is a well-established concept in hospitality and management studies, often defined as the actions organizations take to resolve service failures, restore customer satisfaction, and protect long-term relationships (Cheng et al., 2019; Hess et al., 2003). Research has emphasized strategies such as compensation, apologies, problem-solving, and the empowerment of frontline employees (Bath & Bawa, 2020). However, most frameworks are derived from general business contexts, treating recovery as a managerial or procedural issue while overlooking its communicative dimension. In multilingual tourism encounters, the effectiveness of recovery strategies often depends not only on what is offered (e.g., a discount or upgrade) but also on how it is communicated across linguistic and cultural divides (Uekusa & Matthewman, 2023). Despite this, little empirical work has investigated the role of ELF in shaping recovery outcomes, leaving open questions about the interactional mechanisms that facilitate or hinder recovery in tourism service encounters.

Integrating ELF and service recovery perspectives

While both ELF research and service recovery literature have developed independently, there is growing recognition that communication is central to service quality in multilingual tourism contexts (Thongphut & Kaur, 2025). However, existing studies tend to treat these domains in isolation: linguists focus on communication patterns without linking them to business consequences, while hospitality scholars emphasize recovery strategies without attending to the communicative challenges that shape their success (Zheng et al., 2025). Cultural and pragmatic dimensions – such as differing expectations of apology, politeness, or compensation – remain particularly unexplored (Kadwa & Alshenqeeti, 2020). This fragmentation highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach that combines discourse analysis of ELF interactions with tourism management perspectives on recovery. By situating service recovery within authentic ELF encounters, this study seeks to bridge these domains, offering insights that are both theoretically grounded and practically relevant for tourism professionals.

Conceptual framework

Drawing from ELF interactional research and service recovery theory, such as from Wang et al. (2017), Gomes (2020) and Higgins (2024), this study adopts a four-stage analytical framework: (a) communication breakdown, (b) repair or recovery strategy, (c) cultural-pragmatic mediation and (d) service outcome (perceived satisfaction or dissatisfaction). Communication breakdowns may be lexical, phonological, pragmatic or culturally grounded. Recovery strategies include both interactional repairs (e.g., clarification, rephrasing) and managerial responses (e.g., compensation, proactive adjustment). Cultural-pragmatic mediation shapes how these strategies are interpreted, influencing final outcomes. Each research question maps onto one stage of this framework, allowing

systematic analysis of how ELF communication affects service recovery processes.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative case-based research design to investigate real-world instances of communication breakdowns and service recovery in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) tourism encounter. A case-based approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of naturally occurring interactions, capturing both the communicative features of ELF and the managerial responses to miscommunication within service settings (Matsumoto, 2018). The research was conducted in Gili Trawangan, Senggigi Beach and Mandalika Beach, three of the most popular international tourism destinations in Lombok where ELF is widely used between service providers and tourists. Cases were drawn from hotels, travel agencies, tour operators, and restaurants, with selection criteria requiring (a) direct interaction between staff and international tourists, (b) the use of ELF as the primary medium of communication, and (c) a documented instance of communication breakdown followed by a recovery attempt. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to ensure diversity across service contexts and to capture cases that exemplify ELF miscommunication and recovery practices. Cases were not selected to represent statistical frequency but to provide analytically rich examples of distinct breakdown and recovery patterns across service contexts.

Table 1: List of Participants

Case ID	Participant Role	Business Type	Nationality (Tourist)	Pseudonym (Staff)	Pseudonym (Tourist)	Data Source(s) Used
C1	Hotel Receptionists	Hotel	German	“Anna”	“Markus”	Observation, Interview
C2	Tour Guide	Tour Operator	Chinese	“Luis”	“Wei”	Observation, Interview, Document
C3	Travel Agent	Travel Agency	Spanish	“Sara”	“Carlos”	Observation, Interview
C4	Waiter/Waitress	Restaurant	Japanese	“Maya”	“Kenji”	Observation, Document
C5	Hotel Concierge	Hotel	French	“David”	“Claire”	Observation, Interview
C6	Tour Operator Staff	Tour Operator	Russian	“Elena”	“Alexei”	Observation, Interview, Document
C7	Restaurant Manager	Restaurant	Indian	“Ravi”	“Priya”	Observation, Interview

Participants, as seen in Table 1, included frontline tourism service staff – such as hotel receptionists, tour guides, and restaurant workers – alongside international tourists involved in the encounters. Data were collected through three complementary methods: (1) naturalistic observation and audio recording of real-time tourist-staff interactions to capture authentic examples of miscommunication and recovery; (2) semistructured interviews with staff and, where possible, with tourists to elicit their perspectives on breakdowns and

recovery processes; and (3) document analysis of complaint logs and service reports to triangulate findings. A total of approximately 45 hours of naturalistic observation were conducted across the three destinations. During this period, approximately 120 tourist-staff interactions were observed, of which 35 were audio-recorded with participant consent. From these, seven cases were selected for in-depth analysis based on the presence of (1) a clear communication breakdown and (2) an observable recovery attempt.

Data were then analyzed in two stages. First, transcribed interactions were examined using discourse analysis to identify and categorize types of miscommunication (e.g., lexical misunderstandings, pragmatic failures, pronunciation-related issues), with coding categories informed by ELF and pragmatics literature (Árpád, 2023; Liu & Kinginger, 2021; Sato et al., 2019) and refined inductively. Second, service recovery strategies were analyzed thematically using frameworks from hospitality and service management research (Mir et al., 2023; Sahaf & Fazili, 2024), assessing not only procedural actions (e.g., compensation) but also communicative effectiveness across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Coding decisions were reviewed through peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with qualitative discourse analysis to enhance credibility and reduce researcher bias.

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was applied across observations, interviews, and documents, while member checking with participants confirmed interpretations of their interactions. Peer debriefing with experts in applied linguistics and hospitality management further strengthened the credibility of the findings. The study adhered to institutional research ethics guidelines. Written consent was obtained from all participants, and all data were anonymized. Organizational permission was granted by participating businesses.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study, organized around the research questions: (1) types of communication breakdowns in ELF tourist-service provider encounters, (2) strategies employed for service recovery, (3) effectiveness of these strategies, and (4) the role of cultural and pragmatic factors. Data are drawn from observations, interviews, and document analysis across the seven studies (see Table 1 in Methodology).

Types of communication breakdowns

Analysis of the seven cases revealed four primary categories of communication breakdowns: lexical misunderstandings, pronunciation-related misinterpretations, pragmatic failures and cultural expectation mismatches (see table 2). Lexical misunderstandings appeared in most cases, suggesting that vocabulary alignment remains a persistent challenge in tourism ELF encounters. Pragmatic failures were also common, particularly regarding politeness expectations and request framing.

Table 2. Types of communication breakdowns identified

Breakdown Type	Observed in Multiple Cases	Example Case	Illustration
Lexical misunderstandings	6	C1, C3, C5	Tourist uses idiomatic phrase unfamiliar to staff
Pronunciation-related issues	4	C2, C4	Mishearing due to accent differences
Pragmatic failures	5	C3, C6, C7	Misinterpretation of politeness levels or requests
Cultural expectation mismatches	3	C2, C5	Different understandings of service norms (e.g., tipping, directness)

An excerpt from Case 1 (between Markus as a tourist and Anna as a receptionist) illustrates a typical lexical misunderstanding.

Markus : *“Excuse me, can I have two more cushions for the bed?”*
Anna : *“Cushions? For the sofa?”*
Markus : *“No, no... for sleeping, the bed.”*
Anna : *“Ah, pillows! Yes, of course. The more pillows. I’ll bring them right away.”*

Here, the use of ‘cushions’ instead of ‘pillows’ triggered a breakdown, but clarification quickly restored understanding. These findings support ELF research emphasizing meaning negotiation over grammatical accuracy. However, they also extend the literature by demonstrating that in tourism contexts, such negotiation is not merely a linguistic process but is directly tied to perceived service quality and customer experience. In short-term, transactional encounters, even minor lexical or pragmatic misalignments may carry immediate relational and commercial consequences.

Service recovery strategies

Service providers employed a range of strategies (see table 3), both communicative (clarification, apologies, code-switching, gestures) and managerial (compensation, proactive adjustments). Communicative strategies were often used immediately, while managerial strategies followed when dissatisfaction persisted.

Table 3. Observed Service Recovery Strategies

Strategy Type	Cases Applied	Example Action
Immediate verbal clarification	C1, C3, C6	Staff repeats or rephrases message
Apology (explicit)	C1, C2, C5	“Sorry for the misunderstanding”
Nonverbal support	C4, C6	Gestures, pointing at menus/maps
Compensation	C2, C5	Free meal, discount
Proactive adjustment	C3, C7	Offering alternative service without being asked

Code-switching) to tourist's L1 or sharing language	C2, C6	Staff uses phrases in tourist's language
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A clear example of apology and rephrasing is found in Case C2 (between Luis as a tour guide and Wei as a tourist):

- Luis : *"Please hurry up, we are late."*
 Wei : *"Why you so impolite? I'm already coming."*
 Luis : *"Oh, I'm sorry... could you please come quickly? We need to catch the bus."*
 Wei : *"Okay, now I understand."*

Here, a pragmatic failure was repaired through explicit apology and rephrasing, restoring mutual understanding.

Effectiveness of recovery strategies

Effectiveness (see Table 4) was operationalized using three indicators: (1) explicit verbal expressions of satisfaction or appreciation, (2) absence of continued complaint escalation and (3) documented resolution in service logs. Effectiveness levels (high, moderate, very high) reflect qualitative assessment across these indicators rather than statistical measurement. Clarifications and apologies were effective in minor cases, but compensation and proactive adjustments were necessary for more serious dissatisfaction.

Table 4. Perceived effectiveness of recovery strategies

Strategy Type	Effectiveness Level	Notes
Clarification	High	Worked well for simple misunderstandings
Apology	Moderate	Necessary but insufficient when problem unresolved
Nonverbal support	High	Useful in quick, transactional settings
Compensation	High	Particularly effective for delays or mistakes
Proactive adjustment	Very high	Often exceeded tourist expectations
Code-switching	Mixed	Appreciated but limited by staff proficiency

An example of high-impact recovery comes from Case C7 (between Priya as a tourist and Ravi as a manager):

- Priya : *"I cannot eat this, it has egg. I asked vegetarian."*
 Ravi : *"I am sorry, madam. I will prepare a fresh dish without egg, please allow me five minutes. Meanwhile, let me bring you some snacks, on the house."*
 Priya : *"Thank you."*
 Ravi : *"In India, do you also avoid egg in vegetarian food? Here sometimes people include it."*

Priya : “Yes, in India no egg. Thank you for asking, now it feels like home.”

The tourist expressed appreciation following the proactive adjustment and relational engagement, and no further complaint was raised during the interaction.

Cultural and pragmatic influences

Cultural pragmatic factors significantly shaped recovery outcomes. For example:

- a. Case C5 (French tourist, hotel concierge): A simple apology was insufficient until material compensation was offered, reflecting French expectations of tangible remedies.
- b. Case C2 (Chinese tourist, Spanish tour guide): Directness was perceived as rudeness until mitigated by apology and softened phrasing.
- c. Case C7 (Indian tourist, restaurant manager): Relational talk and cultural acknowledgment were more valued than compensation.

These examples suggest that successful recovery in ELF tourism contexts depends not only on resolving the problem but also on aligning with tourists’ cultural expectations of service and politeness.

Table 5. Summary Across Cases

Case	Main Breakdown Type	Recovery Strategy Used	Effectiveness	Key Cultural/Pragmatic Factor
C1	Lexical misunderstanding	Clarification + Apology	High	Tourist valued direct acknowledgment
C2	Pronunciation + Pragmatic	Apology + Compensation	High	Politeness expectations differed
C3	Lexical + Pragmatic	Clarification + Adjustment	Very high	Proactive solution highly valued
C4	Pronunciation issue	Nonverbal gestures	High	Quick, transactional context
C5	Cultural expectation mismatch	Apology + Compensation	Moderate	Tourist expected material compensation
C6	Pragmatic failure	Clarification + Code-switching	Mixed	Staff had limited L1 skills
C7	Pragmatic + Cultural	Proactive adjustment + Relation talk	Very high	Tourists valued friendliness

Overall, the findings show that lexical and pragmatic issues, as seen in Table 5, dominate ELF tourism miscommunications, and while clarifications and apologies often resolve minor breakdowns, compensation and proactive adjustments are crucial in more serious cases. Importantly, cultural and pragmatic

factors strongly mediate recovery outcomes, with tourists' expectations varying across nationalities. Effective service recovery in ELF tourism thus requires an integrated approach that combines linguistic repair, cross-cultural sensitivity, and hospitality practices.

DISCUSSION

This study examined communication breakdowns and service recovery in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) tourism encounter across hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tour operations. The findings provide new insights into how ELF miscommunication unfolds in real-world tourism interactions and how service providers attempt to recover. In line with prior ELF research from Jenkins et al. (2011), Manzouri et al. (2024) and Moreno et al. (2024), the results confirm that miscommunication is an inevitable feature of multilingual encounters, yet the ways in which service recovery is enacted reveal the critical role of linguistic repair, cultural pragmatics, and hospitality strategies in shaping tourist satisfaction.

Communication breakdowns in ELF tourism

The predominance of lexical misunderstandings and pragmatic failures reflects earlier studies that identify vocabulary limitations and pragmatic mismatches as recurring challenges in ELF interactions (Lewandowska, 2019; Wang et al., 2024). However, this study extends the literature by situating such breakdowns in tourism-specific contexts, where encounters are brief, transactional, and high-stakes for service quality. For instance, the frequent confusion between 'cushion' and 'pillow' (Case 1) or pragmatic misinterpretations of politeness (Case 2) demonstrate how small linguistic gaps can escalate into perceived rudeness or service failure. Unlike classroom or workplace ELF contexts, here, breakdowns directly influence the tourist experience and business reputation.

Service recovery strategies

Consistent with service management frameworks from Taguchi and Ishihara (2018) as well as Mir et al. (2023), recovery strategies included apologies, compensation, and proactive adjustments, but this study highlights the communicative dimension of recovery in ELF contexts. Immediate clarification, nonverbal support, and strategic rephrasing often restore mutual understanding quickly. However, effectiveness depended on how strategies were performed linguistically and pragmatically, not just on what actions were taken. For example, while compensation resolved dissatisfaction in some cases (C5), in others (C7), tourists valued relational talk and cultural sensitivity over material remedies. This reinforces Bolden's (2012) view that recovery is relational as well as procedural but adds a linguistic layer: recovery must bridge language gaps and cultural expectations simultaneously.

Effectiveness and cultural-pragmatic mediation

The cross-case analysis demonstrates that proactive adjustments and relational engagement yielded the highest effectiveness, surpassing basic apologies or clarifications. This supports findings from intercultural service recovery research by Kim & So (2023) but contributes new evidence that tourists’ satisfaction is coconstructed through language choices and cultural alignments. Cultural differences significantly shaped recovery outcomes. French tourists (C5) emphasized tangible compensation, Chinese tourists (C2) prioritized politeness in framing, and Indian tourists (C7) valued relational engagement. These differences align with cross-cultural service studies from Kim and So (2023), Gross et al. (2013) and Chen et al. (2021) but were here observed in real-time ELF interactions, providing richer insights than hypothetical scenarios. Figure 1 illustrates how ELF miscommunication, cultural/pragmatic meditation, and service recovery interact in tourism encounters.

Compared to prior ELF studies conducted in classroom or academic settings, this study highlights how communicative repair unfolds under commercial time pressure and relational stakes. Likewise, while service recovery research has traditionally emphasized managerial remedies such as compensation or procedural justice, the present findings foreground the interactional and linguistic mechanisms through which recovery is enacted in real time. By placing communication at the center of service recovery processes, this study demonstrates that recovery effectiveness in multilingual tourism contexts is coconstructed through language, cultural alignment and relational negotiation.

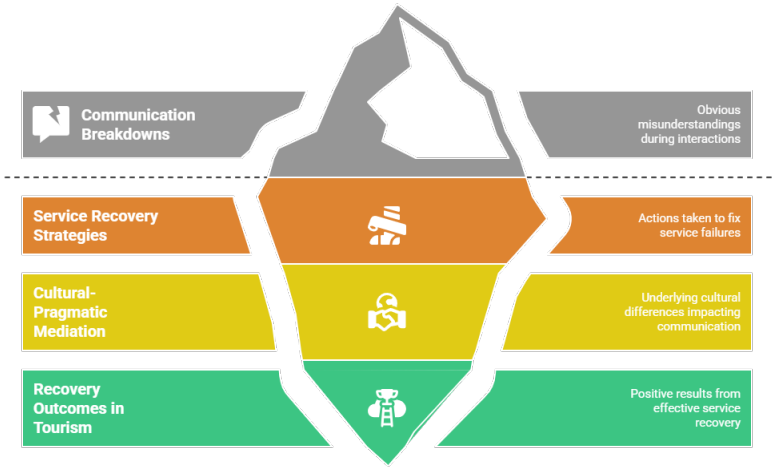


Figure 1. ELF miscommunication and service recovery in tourism

Beyond tourism, these findings offer insight into service encounters experienced by international students and other globally mobile populations. University advising sessions, housing negotiations, healthcare consultations and administrative interactions frequently involve ELF-mediated communication

under institutional constraints. Similar patterns of lexical misunderstanding, pragmatic misalignment and culturally mediated recovery may shape international students' sense of belonging, institutional trust and overall mobility experience. In this way, the analytical framework applied here may inform research on international student support services and cross-cultural campus communication.

Implications

This study demonstrates that communication breakdowns are frequent but manageable in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) tourism encounter. Effective recovery requires more than procedural remedies; it depends on linguistic repair, cultural sensitivity, and proactive hospitality practices. By integrating applied linguistics and service management perspectives, the research contributes to a more integrated understanding of ELF in tourism and offers practical pathways to enhance service quality in multicultural, multilingual environments. The findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of qualitative case-based research. The seven cases analyzed do not aim to represent national tourist populations or all tourism service contexts. Rather, they provide analytically rich illustrations of how communication breakdowns and recovery processes may unfold in ELF-mediated encounters. Cultural patterns observed in this study should therefore be understood as interaction-specific tendencies rather than generalized national characteristics.

The findings offer three integrative contributions to existing scholarships: first, they integrate ELF and service recovery theory, showing that linguistic repair is central to effective recovery; second, they provide tourism-specific insights by demonstrating that encounters are short, transactional, and emotionally charged, which heightens the stakes of miscommunication; and third, they emphasize cultural-pragmatic meditation, extending pragmatic theories of ELF (Fang, 2025; Kim & Therefore, 2023; Thongphut & Kaur, 2024) into hospitality research by showing that recovery success depends on cultural expectations of service, politeness, and relational engagement. Practically, the findings suggest several concrete strategies for tourism and international service settings. First, frontline staff training may incorporate scripted clarification routines (e.g., “Do you mean...?” or “Let me confirm your request...”) to facilitate rapid repair of lexical misunderstandings. Second, pragmatic awareness modules can help staff recognize how directness, politeness framing and tone may be interpreted differently across cultural backgrounds. Third, role-play simulations involving accent variation and culturally diverse complaint scenarios can prepare staff for real-time negotiation of meaning. Finally, empowerment policies that allow frontline employees to offer small compensatory gestures or proactive adjustments without managerial delay may enhance recovery effectiveness in multilingual service encounters.

Despite these contributions, the study also acknowledges certain limitations. Its case-based qualitative design, while valuable for in-depth exploration, restricts generalizability across wider tourism contexts, and its focus on a single

destination may not reflect global diversity in ELF encounters. Future research should therefore expand to multiple regions, incorporate quantitative surveys alongside qualitative case studies, and explore technology-mediated recovery processes such as translation apps and chatbots. Longitudinal studies could also examine tourists' long-term perceptions of recovery effectiveness beyond the immediate interaction. Overall, the study underscores that miscommunication should not be viewed solely as a barrier but as a manageable and potentially transformative aspect of tourism encounters. By foregrounding the intersection of language, culture, and service management, it provides both applied theoretical integration and actionable insights to strengthen communication and service recovery in multilingual, multicultural tourism contexts.

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Author bios

Taufiq Kurniawan serves as a full-time academic lecturer in the English Language and Literature Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Manado State University, Indonesia. Simultaneously, he is completing his doctoral studies

at the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE), specializing in Economics and Regional Sciences. Corresponding with his current field of study, Taufiq's research interests are particularly focused on rural tourism and regional development. As a result, his scholarly publications have thoroughly explored issues pertaining to the development of community-based tourism destinations, their impacts on village economies, and initiatives on sustainable tourism destination development. Email: kurniawantaufiq@unima.ac.id

Assoc. Prof. Satria Agust, S.S., M.Pd., MCE., MCF., was born in Dabo Singkep, Indonesia, on August 18, 1980. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in English Letters from Yogyakarta University of Technology (2008) and a Master's degree in English Education from Sebelas Maret University (2013). He is a senior lecturer in the English Education Department at Raja Ali Haji Maritime University (UMRAH), where he has served in several leadership roles, including Dean of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (2021–2024). His research interests include English language teaching, speaking, grammar, and pronunciation, with numerous publications and reviewing contributions.

Valentina Dyah Arum Sari, S.Pd., M.Hum. is a lecturer in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Mercu Buana Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Her academic expertise includes English Language Teaching (ELT), Applied Linguistics, Academic Writing, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL), and Communication Studies. She focuses on innovative teaching approaches, communicative and intercultural competence, and the integration of technology and creative media in language education. Her research interests encompass English language education, ESP, TEYL, academic literacy, digital innovation in ELT, culture-based pedagogy, and communicative approaches in language instruction. Email: valentina@mercubuana-yogya.ac.id

Titi Lestari is a doctoral candidate in Language Education Science at Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia. Her research interests include Teaching English as a Knowledge and Skill and Assessment for English Language Teaching. Email: titilestari@ustjogja.ac.id

Glenie Latuni is a lecturer at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Manado State University, in the Drama, Dance, and Music Arts Education Study Program. His areas of expertise include performing arts, particularly drama, dance, and traditional music. One of his prominent academic works is entitled "*Kolintang Symbolic Construction of The Union Odd Numbers (Three) in Sociocultural Meaning of Minahasa Community*," which discusses the symbolic meaning of the number three in *kolintang* music and its sociocultural context in Minahasa society. In addition to teaching, Glenie Latuni is also active in research and community service in the field of regional arts and culture. Email: glenielatuni@unima.ac.id
