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“Misunderstanding in Telephone Interaction”
A Qualitative Study of how Non-native Interactants Manage
Misunderstanding in a Mediated Communication

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1. Introduction

Miscommunications, misconceptions and misunderstandings are a common part of everyday human interaction. People, despite their desires to communicate successfully, misunderstand each other's words, silences, gestures or other social actions many often times. Such incidents not only keep happening between interlocutors having different language and culture backgrounds, but also between fellows, spouses, grown-ups and children, medical doctors and their patients, and teachers and their students off and on. Tzanne (2000: 1) is of the view that such misunderstandings may have trivial, entertaining, unpleasant and even catastrophic consequences.

When misunderstanding occurs, some conversants realize the source of problem straight away, but many of them remain unaware of it for longer periods and, in some cases, never come to know how it ever occurred. Miscommunication and misunderstanding in interaction may make close friends uncooperative and difficult; and communication failure and misinterpretation of air traffic controller's silence may result even in plane crash and resulting in loss of lives. Talking about the seriousness of misunderstanding in conversation, Nolasco and Arthur (1987: 8) argue that in second language acquisition, any approach that leads the learners to equate one language form with one particular language function will result in misunderstandings during the interaction because one of the important pre-requisites of a successful communication is being able to make sense of what is contributed by the speaker rightly according to that particular situation.

Different accents, mispronunciation, intonation, effect of mother tongue, cultural impact; are among many factors which account for miscommunication and misunderstanding in conversation. Nolasco and Arthur (1987: 12) refer to a research on the speech habits of Pakistani ladies serving in the canteen of Heathrow Airport. The research revealed that these ladies, as a result of mispronouncing the word *gravy* with a falling intonation, often met a hostile reaction from the people. It is so because the same word when pronounced with a rising intonation sounds pleasant to English people.

The above discussion shows how grave it is to explore the ways people miscommunicate and misunderstand each other during their everyday interactions. This research contributes to study how Chinese and Pakistani interactants in 10 telephone conversations, despite their different cultural backgrounds and different speech habits, manage miscommunications and misunderstandings in their communications.

1.1 Aims

The overall aim of the study is to explore the ways Chinese and Pakistani interactants come across miscommunication and Misunderstanding in their telephone interactions with each other. It will focus on various aspects that hurdle the inter-subjectivity and progressivity of talk between the interlocutors during the telephone interactions.

The purpose behind the data collection for this research on miscommunication and (mis)understanding is to obtain audio recordings of real life telephonic conversation in which misunderstanding or reduced understanding as well as not understanding have occurred

1.2 Participants

Out of 10 audio-recordings, the researcher chose the ones in which the participants were Chinese and Pakistani interactants in such a way that the telephone communication always took place cross culturally i.e between a Pakistani person on one side and a Chinese person on the other. The interactants were all Asian students who are non-native English speakers studying as international students at a university in Sweden. They use English as the medium of communication. The participants of the study, with their initials instead of names for the purpose of anonymity, have been introduced as Q and U; Y and A; J and S; F and X; M and H; and N and W are the international students enrolled in different Master's level programmess at a university. They are not socially close or related.

Although this conversational corpus has a small size, yet suitably designed analyses aiming at finding the misunderstandings with the help of clear-cut proofs and solid evidences in the transcripts; can yield the required results.

2. Theoretical Background

I introduced the topic in the previous section, and in this section I am going to throw light on the theoretical background concerning this issue of miscommunication and misunderstanding. It will encompass the theoretical framework concerning the misunderstandings or non-understandings in the discussions among the conversants on telephone. It will also include misunderstandings, non-understanding and communication failures in intercultural or cross-cultural communication. Moreover it will include some theoretical aspects of telephone conversation.

2.1 Research Background; An Overview

2.1.1 Misunderstanding and Non-understanding

In the discipline of CA, the misunderstanding, non-understanding and communication failure have been popular research areas among the researchers till the end of twentieth century. In this connection, Verdonik (2009: 1364) refers to some significant researchers who investigated this area from different perspectives. These researchers include Bazzanella and Damiano, 1999; Weizman, 1999; Weigand, 1999; Weizman and Blum-Kulka, 1992; Schegloff, 1987; and Zaefferer, 1977. Verdonik (2009: 1364) claims that the researchers of twenty first century, however, didn't prioritize this area for their studies.

Verdonik (2009: 1364) then refers to Zaefferer who proposed a very structural taxonomy: according to him misunderstanding can be misperceptions or misinterpretations and each of these kinds of misunderstandings can play its role to affect the phonological, syntactic, semantic or situational level of interpretation as well as to affect the illocutionary force, the propositional content or even both. The classification of communication failure, as proposed by Thomas was based on pragmatics (ibid: 1364-5). At first level, she classified failure to properly comprehend the proposition and at second level, to comprehend the intended pragmatic force. She termed level-2 as Pragmatic Failure and claimed that it had two types; one being the pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic failure. Weizman and Blum-kulka, according to Verdonik (2009: 1364), introduced another type of classification. They introduced I-level i.e individual level and We-level i.e Collective level

misunderstanding. They found each of these misunderstanding further divided into three different categories. I-level was divided into aboutness, point and mode, whereas, We-level was categorized into aboutness, purpose and mode.

In this concern, Linell (2009: 227) is of the view that misunderstandings are usually attributed to recipients exclusively; it has been observed that the listeners fail to get what the speaker said during the interaction. He adds that the empirical studies about misunderstandings in conversation have shown that miscommunication is the collective and reciprocal outcome and is the product of complicated interaction of the conversants' interpretation of different contextual affordances and of the utterances of each other. Miscommunication in the interaction usually involves mismatches of the interlocutors' objectives and situation definitions. It is not only the utterances that can be misunderstood, but rather utterances with reference to making assumptions and expectations.

Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008: 64) refer to Schegloff's statement that repair in conversation can be seen as crucial to the management of inter-subjectivity as an ongoing process in interaction. Briefly speaking, Schegloff believes that it is not only about getting things right, it is also about establishing that the conversants are working similar understandings of what each of them say and means during the talk in interaction.

2.1.2 Miscommunication in Intercultural Communication

Tzanne (2000: 30) states that researches on cross-cultural misunderstandings, usually reach similar conclusions about the domains of discourse where communication problems may be created. According to him, Erickson, Chick, and Günther are the prominent researchers in the field of misunderstandings in intercultural communication. Tzanne (2000: 30) refers to Chick who identified the following five contributing factors to unsuccessful intercultural communication:

1. Differences in the linguistic systems of the conversants or participants
2. Different frames of reference in meaning negotiation

3. Differences in their politeness behaviour
4. Different ways of managing turn-taking
5. Differences in their listening behaviour

Talking further about listening behaviour, Tzanne (2000: 30) refers to Erickson who noted some culturally conventional ways in which (1) speakers signal the recipients that the active listening response is about to be appropriate, and, on the other hand, (2) listeners signal speakers that they are attentive. Erickson also states that differences in cultures can result in conversants' signaling or noticing the wrong cues as to what their current 'state of union' is, and this makes them misinterpret the context of the situation at any stage in their interaction. Tzanne (2000: 30) refers to Tannen's eight different levels of differences on which cross-cultural communication can come across problems or failure: when to talk, what to say, pace and pauses, listenership which Günther termed 'listening behaviour', intonation and prosody, formulaicity, indirectness, and cohesion and coherence. Tannen claimed that a communicative failure may occur at any of these levels of interaction between the interlocutors with different cultural backgrounds. Tzanne (2000: 30) refers to the research work by Scollon and Scollon in which the authors argue that in case of inter-ethnic communication, grammar is not the cause of problems, but discourse, that is the organization of an argument, the way something is emphasized or the emotional information the speaker wants to pass on while communicating certain ideas. Another instance of the impact of culturally conventional ways was the study of Gumperz (2000: 30). Jennifer Hartog (2006: 175) refers to Gumperz pioneering work on intercultural communication regarding the Indian conversants. According to Gumperz, Indians falling intonation in English questions made them sound rude to the native British interlocutors thus causing communicative problems.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Tzanne (2000: 33) has found the researchers using plethora of terms pertaining the field of miscommunication in inter-cultural interaction. But he regrets to state that there is a lack of unity among the researchers as they use different terms to use the same phenomenon or the same term to discuss different but related phenomenon. In many research-studies, Tzanne (2000: 33) noted that

miscommunication has been discussed in relation to hearing problems or the problems related to understanding the speaker's words in the way he or she wanted them to be heard or understood. Such problems are discussed as "impairing communication to various degrees from partial or ambiguous understanding" (Grimshaw, 1980) to "non-understanding" (Zaefferer, 1977).

Crago, Brophy, Pesco and McAlpine (1997: 245) studied culture-based miscommunication in classroom interaction. They identified many ways teachers and pupils can confuse and misunderstand each other's try to interact in different settings. According to them, analyses of interaction by Cazden, 1988; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 1994; Heath, 1986; Lipka, 1991; McCabe. in press; Philips, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; and Trueba, 1987, in different classrooms outside the mainstream, have proved that certain structures and forms employed both by teachers and students, are culturally variable. The students, who think about personal experience of storytelling as a way to entertain their class-fellows or to communicate a painful experience, are likely to be (understandably) chagrined at grammatical corrections and correction of vocabulary or their teacher's insistence that they should stick only to the topic or should go to the point. In the light of various classroom studies, Dooley (2009: 499) is of the view that "speakers of accented or foreign sounding English language, are not only not accepted as legitimate interaction patterns, but are also expected to carry the heavier part of communicative burden and it is said about them that they are incomprehensible and a communication failure".

2.1.3 Telephone Conversation

In the beginning of this section it is interesting to mention that the mainstream of studies on telephonic conversation is indebted to conversation analysis (henceforth CA) which invests in analytic studies of talk-in-interaction. The early CA researchers restricted themselves to the recordings obtained through telephonic interactions. Sifianou (1989: 527) claims that the study of telephone conversations emerged out of the work pertaining the conversational organization, pioneered by Schegloff. He refers to Schegloff's statement that the telephone talk of the people is not fundamentally different from their other

everyday talk. Cultural differences of the conversants were subsequently pointed out (Godard, 1977). Such differences were presented in terms of the specific communicative event and not as revealing broader differences between human societies. Tiewtrakul and Fletcher (2009: 229) studied difficulties in understanding in the wireless communication between air traffic control and pilots. Their study explored the strong impact of non-native English in pilot–air traffic control communication using the technique of CA. For this purpose they got the recordings from Bangkok airport. The study showed that the errors in communication, defined by incidents of the pilots’ not understanding, occurred significantly more often when the speakers were both non-native English, messages sent are more complex and when numerical information is communicated.

Tiewtrakul and Fletcher (2009: 230) refer to Itokawa and Henley & Daly who state that hurdles in transmissions by non-native speakers, are particularly due to their speed of utterance and a similar pace of speech from native English speakers causes understanding problems resulting sometime even in the form of failure in communication. Tiewtrakul and Fletcher (2009: 230) bring the readers’ attention to Cushing’s work according to which miscommunication is likely to arise from the characteristics of the language itself and also from the mind’s processing of the message heard or received. Tiewtrakul and Fletcher (2009: 230) state that according to Boschen and Jones’ research, some of the particular causes of errors made during the Air Traffic Control Communication of messages in English language include certain linguistic factors like the vagueness in meaning/harmony, word order, and English grammatical rules; and numeric factors e.g. non-metric unit and complex configurations.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Ethnomethodology and CA as Theory

Conversation Analysis is an approach to the study of naturally occurring human conversation especially with a view to focus on the interlocutors’ way of turn-taking, constructing sequence of utterances across turns, identifying and repairing speech related problems with regards to the situated embodied actions including participants’ orientation,

gaze and gestures. It deals with the role and organization of talk in everyday life. Its aim is to explore the organized reasoning procedures which explicate the details of organization of naturally occurring interaction in social situations. CA took its origin from the Harvey Sacks' lectures delivered in the Sociology Department of the University of California. Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008: 2). His transcribed lectures are still a source of inspiration for researchers in the field of Sociology, Social Psychology and Linguistics. As a result of Gail Jefferson's edition work, Harvey Sacks' lectures were published in a book in 1992. CA, according to Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008: 3), lies between the boundaries of Sociology and other Social Sciences disciplines like Linguistics and Social Psychology. CA in its theoretical framework is drawn on Ethnomethodology (also known as EM) and interactional studies.

Ethnomethodology, a term coined by Harold Garfinkel in 1954, is a branch of Sociology dealing with the understanding of codes and conventions underlying everyday social interactions and activities. Ethnomethodology took its origin on the campuses of Californian Universities. Coulon (1995: 2) argues that Ethnomethodology is the analysis of the ordinary methods used by common people for realizing their ordinary actions. He defines Ethnomethodology as the "science of ethnomethods that constitute what Garfinkel called 'Practical Sociological Reasoning'".

At the very start of the first chapter of his book "What is Ethnomethodology?", Garfinkel (1954) states that his study seeks to treat practical activities, practical circumstances, and practical sociological reasoning as areas of empirical study and by paying attention to the ordinary activities of everyday life considering them as extraordinary events, seeks to learn about them as phenomenon in their right (Coulon 1995: 15).

2.2.2 Methods of CA

CA emerged as a variant of Ethnomethodology out of the studies, research and lectures of Sacks, and the close collaborations of his colleagues, Schegloff and Jefferson in 1960s. Heap (1997: 217) is of the view that CA uses conversational materials to address the social

order phenomena. According to him, these phenomena concern how the speakers and recipients manage an orderly and intelligible interaction through the use of rules, methods and traditions for the naturally occurring situations.

Psathas (1995: 1) states that CA, as a methodological approach has developed systematic procedures for analyzing social actions that provide reproducible results. According to Lazaraton (2002: 29) CA is sociological in origin and qualitative in approach, and is concerned with investigating the competences of everyday social activities. It is rooted in Garfinkel's ethnomethodology and Goffman's interaction analysis and Harvey Sacks' works.

CA emphasizes the use of extracts from transcriptions of audio or video recorded and naturally occurring interactions. Transcription of the data is considered to be a step at the core of analysis. Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008: 69) refer to Goodwin and Schegloff who prefer video recordings over the audio ones because they facilitate in describing the gaze and the hand gestures of the participants. Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008: 71) argue that listening to the original recordings repeatedly is quite important in the CA technique to gain an in-depth acquaintance with the recorded material for all necessary details. Transcribing and repeated listening is helpful in finding the starting point for further analysis. Paltridge (2006: 108) states that if a particular feature like the use of increased pitch, high amplitude or some particular sequence of utterance is found apparent in the analysis, it then becomes a point of start for further analysis.

After transcribing the data and after finding a point of start, analysis is a crucial step in CA. Markee (2000: 48) comments that CA unpacks the structure of interaction by presenting an analysis of either single cases or collection of talk in interaction. According to him, the objective behind single cases is to offer an in-depth analysis of a particular aspect within the conversation, which facilitates understanding of how the phenomenon under scrutiny works. Analysis based on collections of similar data enables the researcher or the analyst to note whether the practices to which the interlocutors are thought to orient are robust

enough to account for a huge range of data collected in a variety of different interactional perspectives.

Thus, according to CA/EM, the theory should be data-driven, based on documentary method of interpretation, relying on hearable and widely visible evidence which are demonstrable in analysis of data. The analyst approach to data should be emic with regard to the main features of interaction that are fundamental to CA/EM; interaction is orderly, all phenomena in interaction are significant, meaning-potential, context-bound and indexical, and participants in interaction are in reciprocal relation in understanding one another. Norms in interaction are constitutive of participants' action in inter-subjectivity rather than convention-ruled. Participants' orientation to each other's actions is reflexive so the interpretation of each action is dependent on the recipient's response (Seedhouse, 2004: Chapter one).

3. Methodology

As acknowledged in the last section, the research methodology adopted in this study is CA. Analytic practices of CA, the study of talk in interaction is the primary source of analyzing misunderstanding at talk. Accordingly, following Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008: 69) I use extracts from transcriptions of audio recorded interactions occurring in the naturalistic settings to do the this study's analysis. Transcripts should not be considered as data. Data comprises of audio or video recordings that are transcribed for the purpose of analyses. Transcription glossary based on Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008: x) is attached (Appendix).

3.1 Description of Data

The data employed in this study consists of 60 minutes of telephone conversations among 10 Chinese and Pakistani non-native students studying in different Master programmes at the same university. Although they were studying in the same university, they were not close to each other in terms of social relations. They had been associated with the study programmes in which English language is used as a medium of instruction and obviously all of them can speak and understand English, though with varying level of competence. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and the anonymity of their names would be ensured in the study. Therefore the interactants' names have been denoted by the first letters of their names.

Participants volunteered themselves for the study and showed their willingness by signing a formal letter of consent. They interacted in telephone dyads comprising of a Pakistani and a Chinese interactants. To win their trust and yet not being influential in naturalness of conversation, they were just informed that they were not undergoing any performance test, but recorded for a study of everyday casual telephone conversations. They talked on the topics of their interest considering that they were talking informally to their fellow students. It can therefore be said that the casual conversation, though gathered by arranged recording, seemed to have occurred in naturalistic settings. Some of the participants talked about their programmes, others chose admission related issues, their performance in their courses and their routine matters they come across in their academic life in the university.

The interactions were audio recorded using the voice recording facility commonly found in the cell phones. The participants interacted alone and uninterrupted with the recording mechanism of the cell phones switched on. The recordings were then transcribed using the Ian Hutchby and Robin Wooffitt's transcription glossary (2008: 69).

The following research questions were designed for the study:

1. What is the background of the miscommunication in the recording?
2. What proof do the transcripts provide for the miscommunication?
3. How does miscommunication emerge?
4. How is miscommunication negotiated by the speaker and the recipient?
5. What makes an interactional unit a trouble source?

4. Analysis

In the previous section, I explained the methodology adopted in this study and I will analyze the data collected, in this section. The findings on miscommunication and misunderstanding in the data will also be presented. The analyses of each example will be done by keeping all the research questions in mind.

4.1 Misunderstanding Due to Pronunciation

Miscommunication and misunderstanding, according to Tzanne (2000: 30), may be a result of the differences in the linguistic systems of the conversants. The recorded data had instances of misunderstanding concerning pronunciation. The following example(s) illustrate this:

Y and A are talking about the eligibility criterion for admission to Master's programmes at the University. Y, knowing the fact that A is/ or regarding A to be senior or experienced student, is asking a few questions from A. The example considered concerns IELTS, the abbreviation for International English Language Testing System. Throughout the world, it is considered to be one of the acceptable tests to check the language proficiency of a candidate.

Example 1

71 Y. emhn: h (0.6) >thank (.) you very much< (.) >e< (.) and: (.) d (.) do we (.)
72→ have (.) to (.) pass (.) the (.) > /'æltz/?/<
(1.5)
73→ A. >WHAT:??<
(0.6)
74 Y. do we have to (.) pass: (.) the (.) i mea:n .h (.) do (0.4) <de (.) d< (.) (the
75 say) (.) rr: (.) require (.) any (.) a: (.) langu(.)ge (0.3) pro(.)fo: (0.3)
76 [pro(.)fo]
77 A. [ya::] (.) ya (.)

Y asks A if the applicants for admission to the university need to pass IELTS but she, instead of pronouncing the word IELTS as /'aI,elts/, as per international standards, articulates it as ['ælt] thus causing a misunderstanding for A. This misunderstanding is also obvious from A's high toned response in line 73. Y realizes this and in her next attempt in line 74, 75 and 76, instead of going for the same word, she repairs by calling it as language proficiency. In this way, she successfully repairs herself by rephrasing her previous utterance. By saying the word 'ya' in line 77, Y manages to make A understand. It is concluded that the misunderstanding, in this case, may have happened for the miscommunication (mispronunciation) of the word IELTS in line 72.

4.2 Misunderstanding Due to Grammatical Structure

Complex grammatical structure may be a source of misunderstanding. The recorded data had proof of misunderstanding concerning grammatical structure. In their telephone call at 1700 hours, M tells H about their next day's meeting. H asks about the room No. where the meeting has to take place and M. responds by stating that, tomorrow, he plans to ask Younas, their class-mate, to decide about the room. In the previous part of the discussion, they had agreed to a meeting *tomorrow* i.e the next day. The following example will explain it.

Example 2

- 83→ M. no: butta (.) a:: (.) i will mail: (.) to younas that a: please decide any room
84 (1.36) [where we have to meet] tonight:
85 H [>okhay okhay] (2.1) >oh< ((noise of many people))
86 M. [okay:] = ((noise of many people))
87 H. [(>you mea:n a] (0.2) you mean you mean a that<) we will meet:
88 >tonight:<?
89 (0.9) ((noise of the people))
90→ M. A::N (.) a e sorry i (.) ca:n't understand your >question<?
(1.5)
91 H. e:n (0.3) ((swishing sound)) i i'm (.) wonderin(g) (.) e:n if:: you and
92 youna:s will meet: toni:ght
93 (0.2)
94→ M. ok(.)ay: (1.84) at (.) what (.) >time?<

- (2)
- 95 H. (...) a i just: a:sk a if: you and youna:s a will meet [-] ((noise of many people))
- 96 →M. [okkay:] (0.35) o:kay okay ((noise of the people)) (0.2) >Okay see you< tomorrow (0.4) e:n [see you on]
- 97 H. [en see you] see you

In line 83, M is informing H that he will mail Younas and request him to arrange their tomorrow's meeting in the room of his choice. We see that M makes a wrong choice of preposition i.e *to* with mail. In line 84, M doesn't follow the grammatical rules concerning the change of narration as he makes a wrong choice of the time expression *tonight* and creates a problem for H to understand it. In line 85, we see H's misunderstanding as he thinks that the meeting has been rescheduled to take place the same night i.e the day when they had the telephonic contact. It is also obvious from his question in line 87 and 88. M intends to take Younas's guidance before their tomorrow's meeting, but lines 83 and 84 show that he wants the meeting *tonight* i.e the same day. M's ungrammatically received contribution in line 83 and 84 is followed by H's misunderstanding in line 85. H, for clarifying the ambiguity, tries to confirm through his question whether the meeting has to take place the same night in lines 87 and 88. In line 90, M is unable to understand the question as he himself accepts this fact. Moreover, H asks whether M will meet Younas the same night to confirm about the meeting time and place but, M fails to pick the question. In line 94, he agrees to it and asks H about the meeting time. H tries to make it clear by saying that he just asked M if he and Younas will meet the same night. This indicates that M didn't understand what H asked. However, line 97 shows that M's repair has worked and H has understood what M said.

Example 3 About the Project

N is asking W regarding his studies and future plans.

- 74→ N. e v what(.) is the: your (.) ti(.)tle of your< (.) project?:
(1.5)
- 75→ W. WHAT?
(0.2)
- 76 N. [what is the]
- 77 W. [>I'm sorry<] =

78 N. ti(.)tle of your (.) project?,
 (0.3)
 79 W. a: title: (.) the title is (.) >the: relationship< between a: .h (0.4) (IASGP)
 80 relation between ((xxx)) and a: lung cancer

In line 74, N wants W to tell him what the title of his project is. But either his redundant use of the possessive pronoun *your* or his misuse of it, creates misunderstanding for W who shows his sign of misunderstanding using the word *what* with a louder tone in line 75. It can be said that there are two possible potential problems in the contribution of N in line 74 which may have caused misunderstanding : one "the you" and another is misarticulation or miscommunication of the word "title" as indicated by a micro-pause in the articulation of the word title. In line 74, N has made no other mistake except this so this is the only obvious evidence to show N's ungrammatical syntactic utterance that results in misunderstanding in this case. In lines 76 and 78, N repeats his question but this time it is overlapped with W's apology in line 77 which shows his helplessness to understand N. W politely expresses his helplessness to understand what N said. N, somehow, completes his question to repair himself. W's right response, in lines 79 and 80, regarding the title of the project shows that W has understood the question successfully and has understood N's question.

Example 4

M wants to know whether H will be joining the next day's meeting. But he seems to have problem with the use of preposition in his conversation.

60 M. we will (.) be (.) there over .h (.) >ok(.)ay: so< are you (.) coming? (2.7)
 61 a
 (0.2)
 62→ H. [sorry]?
 63 M. [a e a:n] are you (.) coming?, (.) tom: a:: on Monday? .mt (0.3) at (.)
 64 five?
 65 (0.2)
 66 H. YEA: (.) a >i will i will:> (be) coming

In line 60, he asks H whether he plans to come to join them in their tomorrow's meeting or not. He wanted to say "*we will be over there*" but he misuses the preposition *over* by using

it before the word *there* thus making a clear grammatical error. This, along with *a* sound after a long gape of 2.7 seconds, is the only visible evidence and reason behind H's misunderstanding. In line 62, we see that H doesn't understand M and points out the misunderstanding by saying *sorry* to request him repeat what M said and to point out his misunderstanding. In lines 63 and 64, M repeats his question to repair and in line 66, H's response shows that he comprehended what M asked. However, it will also be inappropriate to state that the misunderstanding is solely because of *there over*. M's question in line 60, shows an evidence of his mother tongue effect as e.g we see in the word *coming* where the first syllable is accented. So we may conclude that grammatically inappropriate utterance and the mother tongue effect are the source of trouble here.

Example 5

In the previous part of this telephonic communication, J is taking some information from S regarding his programme of study.

- 92 J. it's a: one year (.) (ph) (.) prog(.)ra:mme or: (.) two year:r?
(2.7)
- 93→ S. a: (wha: is (.) it:?) (xxx years::?) (0.6) >what do ya mea:n<?
(0.6)
- 94 J. a:na (.) um: (.) two years (.) .mt
- 95 S. ya: it it's a two year program:mme = ya >it's a masters program (.) fo:r
international students
(0.2)
- 96 J. >yes (.) it's (.) a ma:s(.)ter prog(.)ra:m ((smacking sound))
97 (0.9) .mt (0.4)
- 98 S. ya .mt ((smacking sound continues for 1.1 seconds)) (.) smacking sound
continues
for 0.4 seconds)) =

In line 92, J she asks him whether his programme is one year or two year programme. This example is a complex one as it is ambiguous as to whether J is asking a question or making a statement. But this ambiguity is largely because of the fact that although she is asking a question, she ignores the basic grammatical norm regarding the use of “is, am and are” and instead of starting her question with *is*, she starts with *it* which can result in a misunderstanding or confusion. The other factor along with the grammatical factor is that

of low amplitude in J's voice. The question mark at the end of J's question is meant to notate the rising pitch which is a normal case in questions. The statement before the conversation shows that J is asking a few questions to take the programme related information from S and the recorded conversation clearly shows that J is asking a question and it's not a statement. We can also say that S could not receive J's interrogative statement as a question and misunderstood it. There is a long gap of 2.7 seconds which otherwise is meaningless for a simple question. In line 93, he uses the word *what* to indicate that he misunderstood what she said and then asks her to explain what she means. Then in line 94, she herself goes on to answer that the programme is a two year programme. She does this as an act of repair. She doesn't use the rising tone here as compared to line 92. Their conversation in 96, 97 and 98 shows that the misunderstanding element in their communication has gone and the conversation is now a success.

4.3 Misunderstanding Due to Names

Misunderstanding the names of each other may be a hinderance in the progress of interaction. It is not just repeating the name but the whole inter-subjectivity and progressivity of interaction may be affected by not knowing, or not properly hearing, or not understanding, or misunderstanding the names especially in telephonic interactions. Olsen (2005: 145) is of the view that foreign names may be problematic even if they are commonly used brand names. In such cases, we can say that cultural traditions regarding names vary from country to country.

The recorded data has two evidences of misunderstanding concerning the use of names. The following example shows that knowing and getting foreign names pronounced right is important in telephone conversations.

Example 6

Y asks A what his name is.

- 88 Y. okhay (.) and: (.) what's your name >again?<
(0.5)
- 89 A. .h (.) a: my >name is (.) adna:n: < .mt
(0.5)
- 90→ Y. n: (.) na::n? (.) >what?< (0.2) what (0.4) [can you repeat?],
91 A. [adna:n]
(0.3)
- 92→ Y. Et(.)na:n (.) [okay]
93 A. [ya]
- 94 Y. okay (.) >it's a nice< name (0.5) ok(.)ay (.) thank(.)you very much (0.3)
95 £ thankyou ((in whispering tone)) =
96 A. £ o: (h)kay .h

In line 89, A tells his name but the way he pronounces it carries ambiguity and creates misunderstanding for Y. The textual evidence for Y's misunderstanding is Y's attempt and consequent failure to pronounce A's name as per his desires. In line 90, she requests him to repeat it. He does so in line 91, and Y tries to pronounce in a better way which is also acceptable to A. On the other hand, in line 94 and 95, we see the satisfaction on the part of Y for successful attempt to pronounce a difficult name. In line 95, she thanks him for removing the ambiguity concerning his name and helping her understanding and rightly pronouncing the name.

Example 7

This example is a really nice case of name's recognition and progressivity without real success on pronouncing the name as it is. It shows that understanding between participants doesn't depend on the exact exchange words as its normal but the interpersonal alignment and affiliation through negotiation. This is another example showing misunderstanding in conversation concerning names. It occurs at the opening stage of the telephonic interaction when F, being the caller, introduces himself so that X can understand who the speaker is.

- 10→ F. yes alex: (.) umer is here:
(1.5)
- 11 X. sorry:?
13 (0.28) .h
- 12→ F. UMER =

13→ X. U:LLA [>a:h ye:<]
 14 F. [ye::s] (.) >yes (.) yes (.) ye< h[ow a:re you?]
 15 X. [ha ya]? (0.3) ay it's goo:d,

In line 10, F introduces himself by telling X his name which is followed by a long pause. It is an obvious space for the next speaker to contribute to the conversation. After 1.5 seconds of pause the rising pitched “sorry” might formulate the problem. but it carries ambiguity as X misunderstands it. At first X shows his reaction by saying the word *sorry*, in line 11, which indicates that he couldn’t understand what F said and that wanted F to repeat it. In line 12, F repeats his name, but X initially misunderstands it to be Ullah i.e another name but then immediately shows the sign of satisfaction that he has recognized the speaker. Line 15 also shows that X has understood and recognized that he is talking to F.

4.4 Misunderstanding Due to Pace of Utterance

Speedy utterances hurdle the understanding and flow in conversation. According to Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Gottfried and Larsen (2010: 46) communication pace should be kept low in interaction with people with cross cultural, ethnic or immigrant backgrounds. Thomsett and Nickerson (1993: 36) state that our quickness in talk, may cause complications in understanding process. It is so because pace in communication causes problem in understanding. The recorded data has the following instances where misunderstanding concerns pace in communication:

Example 8

The purpose of the call, in this case, was to intimate with each other. Upon Q’s request, U tells her that he is a PhD student having recently completed his Master’s degree.

19 Q. so grea:t .h (0.3) a:: (0.7) he he (.) ya (.) .h well:: (0.4) >do ya like (.) our
 20 (.) school< i m: a: >lin(.kõ(.ping univers (.) ity (.) student (.) too< (.) do
 21 ya like (.) it:? (.) i like (.) it: very mu:ch:
 (0.8)
 22→ U. ey: (.) en:: (1) ((whispers)) >excuse me?< (0.3) i mean: (0.4) .h e:: y: (.)
 23 >your voice: (.) is< not very (.) clear (.) i don’t know why what’s: (.) the

communication with pilots. The recorded data has the following instances where misunderstanding concerns the mother tongue effect in communication:

Example 9

H and M are discussing the time and venue of their intended meeting. H's mother tongue is Mandarin and M speaks Sindhi as his mother tongue. When both of them speak, their speech is marked by the effect of mother tongue.

- 79 H. >So in which (roomo) v< we will meeting? (0.2) with:
(1)
- 80→ M. a: (.) ya: younas
(2.4)
- 81 H. you know which: you know which room:? (.) we will: >meet< =
- 82 M. =no: but a (.) a::: (.) i will mail: (.) to younas that a: please decide any room
(1.36) [where we have to meet]

In line 79, H asks him that in which room they are going to meet the next day. But the recorded transcript shows that his question is clearly marked by his local Chinese accent which when mixes with the faster pace and the ungrammatical utterance, creates misunderstanding for M who misunderstands H and thinks or rather guesses, in line 80, that he is asking about Younas, one of their common friend. It is obvious that he couldn't get what H asked. But in line 81, M goes on to repair himself by reformulating his question about the place of meeting. In line 82, we see that M has understood H's question but the way he uses the words 'no: but a', is also indicative of his previous misunderstanding. It wouldn't be easy to state that the misunderstanding has resulted only because of the mother tongue effect but the recorded part clearly shows the convincing role the local Chinese language has played in this case.

Example 10

N and W are discussing about their exam-results. N speaks Punjabi as his mother tongue and W speaks Mandarin. N tells him about his success and when W asks him if N knows about his result.

- 24 N. ya you ha:ve: a >yesterday< you did (.) no:t? (.) get: e >your:< (.)
 25 result(s)?,
 (1.7)
 26→ W. WHA:T: .h?
 (0.2)
 27 N. yes(.)terday you did no:t (.) get (.) your: (.) result?
 28 W. no:: (0.4) from where? (0.2) from where?

In line 24, N asks him whether he did not receive and check his result sent by the teacher. But the audioed recordings show that N's question is marked by his local Punjabi language accent because of which his question becomes ambiguous for H creating misunderstanding which is evident in line 26 by his using the word *what* which is also meant to request him repeat his question. N's prolonging the sounds as in case of *ha:ve:* and *no:t*; and his pauses which are frequent and more evident in line 27 are a proof of his use of local Punjabi language which is clearly affecting his communication. A long gap of 1.7 seconds also indicates that W tried for a long time to understand N's question but failed to get it. In line 35, W's high-toned *what* makes N repeat his question in order to make a repair in line 27. However line 28 confirms that W has successfully received what N wanted to convey. However, it will also be appropriate to state that along with the mother tongue effect, wrong stress as in case of result(s) in line 25 and speedy utterances as in line 24, also account for the misunderstanding of W in line 26.

Example 11

A and Y, are discussing the eligibility criterion regarding admission to Master's programmes at the university. Y, the speaker in the following example, speaks Cantonese as her mother tongue in China

- 33 Y. >where< (.) t (0.2) where (.) do i (.) get: (0.2) the (0.3) ad:(0.3)mission (.)
 form?
 34 (1.5)
 35→ A. (<ha a>) (.) a: (0.2) what:?
 (0.6)
 36 Y. .h e: (.) ha (.) un (.) you >said (xx) (.) that (.) < we need (.) a: (.)
 37 ad(.).mi:ssion (.) form (0.2), from [the::]

38 A. [akay]
39 (.) a: >actually:< you have (.) to apply (.) it onli:ne:

In line 33, Yan asks A where she can get the admission form but her question and the way she asks it, is clearly marked by her local Chinese accent thus creating a misunderstanding. The distortions in pronunciation in Y's speech in the form of pauses within the words like admission in line 33, and other pauses between different words within the utterance in the same line along with her act of prolonging the word *get*; clearly indicate that she is using a different idiolect that is the source of trouble in the conversation. The misunderstanding is indicated by A's *what* in line 35, which obviously stands for the misunderstanding and is meant to request Y to repeat what she asked. The laughter which is shown in Y's next turn may be a sign of mitigating the sharp "what" in the previous turn. The contribution of A. in line 35 after a long pause of 1.5 seconds can be received as a misalignment. With Y's question but the laughter in the beginning of her response in line 36, Y tries to affiliate with A. again by referring to what A. said and reformulate her previous question in a form of statement with a gap which could be filled by A. Moreover, the pauses in lines 37 and 38 and the speedy utterances in line 37 also point out that Y rushes to change the state of uncommunicative utterance to a communicative one. . But they are a part of her attempt to repair. A's response in line 39 and 40 shows that message has been successfully communicated as in these lines, we find A replying as per the demand of Y's question.

4.6 Misunderstanding Due to Non Clarity and Pitch

Thomsett and Nickerson (1993: 32-33) argue that if we, as listeners, want our speakers to enunciate carefully to us, we should also set the example. Moreover, talking about loudness, he says that the ones, who talk to us with higher amplitudes, have the misconception of being justified. They may be right, but not always. The recorded data has the following instances where misunderstanding concerns the clarity or loudness in communication. It is quite striking that all these instances refer to the same recording.

Example 12

J tells S that she is a student at Linköping University and asks him whether he also studies in the same university. S's voice carries high pitch and shrillness and J, on the other hand, speaks with lesser intensity in her voice.

- 12 S. **ya** (0.2) **ya** >**i'm** (.) (**also**) **in the**< a: (0.3) **same universi(.)ty?**,
(1)
13→ J. *sorry?*
(1.2)
14 S. **I'm also** (.) **in the** (.) **same univer(.)si(.)ty**,
(0.3)
15 J. *ye::* (0.4) >en what's your< program:mme?

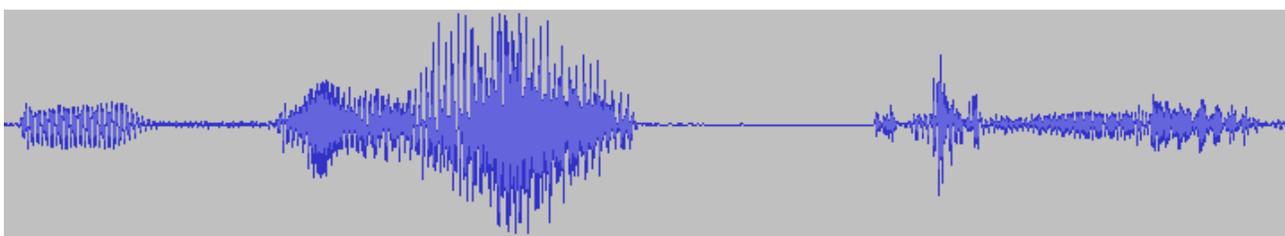
In line 12, S replies that he is also studying in the same university but his tone, as indicated by the bold words, together with the shrillness and high pitch, as indicated by higher sound waves of Audacity-software, in his voice, makes his reply rather ambiguous. His reply that lacks clarity creates an element of misunderstanding in the conversation. Although J tries to pick the meaning in his statement which he makes in an interrogative manner and which clearly demands her to explain why she is asking thus, yet J misunderstands him in line 13. Her misunderstanding is indicated by her word *sorry* which serves two purposes i.e, accepting her helplessness to understand what he said and asking him to repeat. In line 14, S rightly judges it, though after a long pause of 1.2 seconds, and repeats his answer as a positive statement. In Line 15, the word *ye* shows that the message has been understood by J. Moreover, it can also be noted that S's repair or recycling in line 14, has more pauses as compared to those in line 12. It can be said that in line 14, S has tried to be clearer and this has resulted in success in communication here.

Example 13

- 34 J. so (.) how's (.) your (.) pro(.)gramme:?
(1.2)
35 S. >(a: **it's going well**):<
(1.4)
36→ J. sorry >i (.) can't hear you (.) cl[ea:rly].

37 S. [it's] (0.2) **it's** (.) **going well**
 (1.0)
 38→ J. sorry?
 (0.7)
 39 S. **it's going well: it's** (.) **going: a** (.) **fi.ne.** (0.6) **it's good** (2.3) .mt (0.2)
 (0.3)
 40→ J. >sorry< (.) can you s:pea:k: (.) louder:?
 (0.8)
 41 S. **ahan** >(i'm)< **i'm saying it's** >**it's good**:> (.) .mt (1.3) .mt (.) .mt: (.)
 42 >it's (.) **good**<

In line 34, J wants S to tell her how his programme is going and she wants him to give a comment regarding it. S, in line 35, simply says that it's going well but J finds a lack of clarity rising clearly from S's high pitched shrill voice in his reply as indicated in J's apologetic reply in line 36 showing her helplessness to get him. She wants him to repeat what he said. In line 40, her word *sorry* points out the misunderstanding resulting from the lack of clarity or high amplitude level and at the same time, is indicative of her asking him to repeat. In lines 38 and 40, J fails to understand twice more, even after her repeated request to clarify the ambiguity. She is persistent in requesting him to repeat with a louder tone although the sound waves clearly show that S' voice has more amplitude as compared to her. It is the shrillness that makes his messages lacking clarity and not the volume as it is already high enough for a normal man.



The above figure shows clearly the difference in the pitch levels of S and J. The higher waves show the voice of S and the lower waves indicate lower pitch in J's voice. This difference in their pitch can clearly be noted throughout this transcript.

Example 14

S wants J to tell him her name but J is persistent in avoiding doing so.

74 S. [ɛ ehanf wa] ((laughs)) (0.2) ((swishing sound)) (0.8) ehn .h (.) and >why
75 is it< tha:t?
(1.3)
76→ J. sorry?
(1)
77 S. eh why v why can't: you: (.) tell me? (.) yo your na:me? (.) .mt
78 J. a::m (1.5) because >e it'sa: secret.

In line 74, S wants to know the reason why she is hesitating to tell her name. But the question he asks is rather vague because his voice combines high amplitude, shrillness and lack of clarity as indicated in the diagram previously. These elements make him miscommunicate, an otherwise, simple question. In line 76, J's use of the word *sorry* indicates her misunderstanding although she tries for 1.3 seconds to understand his question. This situation puzzles S who after a long pause of one second, goes on to repeat his question as an act of repair in line 77. Line 78, indicates that the communication has been done successfully and J has got the question.

Example 15

S is a student of Master's in Statistics and Data Mining. J is taking some information from S regarding his programme of studies and his educational background.

104 J. an:d (.) how's (.) you:r (.) B:.A: de(.)gree (0.4) em (.) in (.)
105 statis(.)tic(.):s:?
106 .mt (.) ((long smacking sound that lasts for 1.0 second))
107→ S. a my (.) gra:de?
108 (1.0) ((1.3 second long smacking sound)) (.) .mt
109 J. ya (0.2) ((smacking sound lasting for 1.4 seconds))

In line 104, she asks about the nature of his graduation degree and then keeping his Master's programme in Statistics and Data Mining in mind, she herself tries to produce an expected answer in line 105, which, at the same time, is a question aimed at confirming from him if his major was in Statistics. The notation mt. shows that there is a smacking sound during the conversation, and the point can be raised that the misunderstanding is

because of it. There is a long pause of one second, which shows that, on his turn, S is taking time to understand the question and make a suitable reply. But line 107 shows that he fails in doing both and this points out that the misunderstanding which may be because of her low amplitude or lack of clarity in J's question or because of the smacking sound, is still there. It has been observed that a person with high amplitude in his voice, expects others to have the same in their voice. S misunderstands her question to be about his grades in line 107. It is followed by a long gap which perhaps indicates that J is taking time to make some suitable repair strategy. But then in line 109, she removes the confusion by confirming S's question that yes, she wanted to ask about the grades. She might have done this to keep a flow in the conversation, but her saying *ya* in line 109, suggests that either she has no interest in the answer or she doesn't know what else to say.

Example 16

J is consistently resisting S's questions and is avoiding telling him her name.

133 J. a:n i (.) can(t) tell n tell you my na:me (0.4) .h may (.) [be::]
 134 S. [>m<] (.) >but
 135 i have now your phone number (.) right?
 (1)
 136→ J. sorry?
 (0.7)
 137 S. i've got your (.) >phone number< now right?
 (0.2)
 140 J. e yes:

Line 133 indicates that J is not willing to tell him her name. This time in line 134 and 135, S points out that as he has got her telephone number through his cell phone, so he can find out her name through some other sources and thus probably tries to convincing over her insistence but J again misunderstands him and she again uses the word *sorry* in line 136 which, is treated as a request of re-explaining the prior question. S tries to be clear and unambiguous in line 137 to repair and avoid the communication failure. In line 140, J's yes indicates that she has understood S's request.

5. Concluding Discussion

I introduced the interactional problem analyzed and discussed in the study, overviewed some of the related literature to give information about the background of the relevant theories applicable in the study, specified the methodology which was applied to the data collected through audio recordings and finally I provided the analytic description of the recordings in the last chapter. This chapter will summarize the study and catalogue the findings.

The previous section dealt with misunderstanding caused by different factors in a telephonic conversation. Factors affecting the next speaker's understanding in a series of telephone conversation have been scrutinized in this study. Misunderstanding may be caused by mispronouncing certain words or sentences, bad accent, various grammatical errors e.g prepositional mistakes, weak grasp over using cross cultural names, effect of mother tongue on our second language speech and our voice void of clarity; may create serious misunderstandings in the telephone conversations.

This study used the CA methodology to explicate the ways that some Chinese and Pakistani interactants studying at Linköping University, co-jointly manage different types of misunderstandings in their mutual telephone conversations. The overall purpose of this study was to focus on misunderstanding caused by the factors like pronunciation, accent, grammatical inaccuracy, complicated names, the mother tongue effect, and lack of clarity in the conversants' voices. All these factors disrupt the smooth flow of the talk in interaction and the interlocutors keep using the words like "what", "sorry" or "excuse me" to demand clarification of the message communicated by the speaker till the end of their conversation.

The scope of the study was limited only to 20 Chinese and Pakistani interactants enrolled in different post-graduate programmes at Linköping University. These international interactants showed written consent to audio record their mutual telephone conversation for study purpose.

5.1 Findings and Conclusions

Although the participants were free to talk on any topic of their choice, they discussed the study related issues in their telephone interactions in a natural way. The findings of the study are presented below:

1. According to the example 1, the way that participants in talk pronounce certain words may cause misunderstanding between the conversants. Sometime the mispronunciation is because of the stress and sometime it's the accent which hurdles the flow of conversation. Based on this study one can see the number of misunderstandings which are as a result of interaction between non-native foreigners using English as a lingua-franca while having different mother tongue rather than English.
2. Examples 2, 3, 4 and 5 show that being the non-native speakers of English, Chinese and Pakistani interactants usually fall a prey to grammatical inaccuracies. This study also shows that whenever people from these two nationalities, ignore the grammatical structure in their mutual interaction, it causes miscommunication and misunderstanding.
3. Due to the difficulty of pronouncing linguistically different names in cross-cultural communications, participants in many instances (examples 6 and 7) demonstrate misunderstanding of them. It might be seen that it is caused by a simple diphthong, short vowel or long vowel in a name which is misunderstood or wrongly produced in the cross-cultural interactions, thus causing a trouble in progressivity and intersubjectivity in interaction.
4. The habit of producing speedy utterances in the telephone interactions is observed among some participants (example 8) and this phenomenon usually results in misunderstanding among them.

5. In some certain conversations as in examples 9, 10 and 11, there is a clear impact of linguistic background influencing the whole interaction. In this regard, it is a matter of common observation that the regional dialects in Pakistan (Punjabi, Siraiki, Sindi ,Balochi, etc) and China (Mandarin, Wu, Min, etc) may cause every participant to have their own specific effect on interaction. This element together with common possible sources of trouble in naturally occurring conversations i.e different sorts of cutoffs, pauses, gap, laughter, distorted syntactical and prosodic interactional units may create misunderstanding in the conversation.
6. According to examples 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16, many of the participants in the audio-recordings hearably addressed the problem of clarity in the speaker's voice stating that they couldn't understand the speaker's utterance as their voice lacked clarity. This factor besides the problem of too high or too low amplitude in the conversation also accounts for misunderstanding.
7. The last point which can be addressed here is the question if there are ways to avoid misunderstanding in interaction. The probable conclusion drawn upon this study can be that most of the failures based on the linguistic performance can be solved by prior preparation and language practices; uncommunicative grammatical structuring and mispronouncing words can be avoided in this way. The fast pace of talk out of some personal or cultural habits can be controlled. By doing so interactants may lessen the risk of miscommunication in interaction.

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Appendix

Transcription Symbols

(0.4)	The number within parenthesis, the time gap in tenths of a second
(.)	Short pause, less than two tenths of second
=	‘latching’ between utterances
[]	Onset and end of overlapping talk
.h	breathing in or inhaling
(())	transcriber’s comments
:::	Stretching of the preceding sound
(-)	Unclear fragment in the recordings also indicated by (xxx)
word.	A stopping fall in tone
word,	Continuing intonation
word?	A rising inflection
<u>word</u>	Underlined part, speaker’s emphasis
WORD	Capitalization, voice louder than the surrounding talk
word	bold, unclear and high pitched voice
><	Talk encompassed within the signs is quicker than the surrounding talk
<>	Talk encompassed within the signs is slower than the surrounding talk
→	Arrows in the left margin point to some specific parts