Misunderstanding and Non-understanding in the Usage of English as a Common Language in Helpdesk Encounters Involving Nonnative Speakers

Master’s Thesis for the Communication Studies Programme

University of Twente
The Netherlands

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Enschede, 31 August 2006

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SUMMARY

The gradual internationalization of ‘technical help over the phone’ as an enterprise and the increasing application of helpdesk services in organizations highly characterized as intercultural and international have necessitated the usage of a common language that can be used when two individuals with different linguistic backgrounds decide to commence a transaction. A number of researchers (for instance Gass & Varonis, 1991; Weigand, 1999; and Kurhila, 2001) have asserted that when people interact using a secondary language, problems with understanding are inevitable.

It has been pointed out that the causes of misunderstanding and non-understanding in conversations involving nonnative speakers of a language can be attributed to the interacting parties’ cultural and linguistic differences (also evident in the works of Gass & Varonis, 1991; and Weigand, 1999) – and when we focus on linguistic differences, the premise is that understanding problems are due to the interacting actors’ difficulty in the correct construction of sentences, their unfamiliarity with the vocabulary of the language in use, and their problems with the proper pronunciation of words and terms. Another view, however, is that misunderstanding is not only caused by linguistic but also by pragmatic factors.

Realizing that problems with understanding are normal occurrences in intercultural conversations, interacting individuals are expected to resort to varied approaches in resolving understanding problems – the most common, however, is repair. Although, in this research the concept of ‘preventing possible understanding problems’ is also explored.

To address the questions of this study, telephone conversations made in a commercial call center and a helpdesk of an educational institution were recorded and were subjected to the methodology of Conversational Analysis. The selection of the recordings for transcription and analysis was in accordance with the following research problems:

1. What are the factors behind the occurrence of misunderstandings in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative English speaking clients and agents?
2. How are these misunderstandings repaired and who initiates the repair?
3. What causes non-understanding in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative speakers of English
4. Who usually recognizes the inception of non-understandings in helpdesk conversations and how are they repaired?
5. How do participants in helpdesk encounters prevent problems of misunderstandings?

It has been revealed that misunderstandings in helpdesk conversation involving nonnative English speakers are due to false beliefs, erroneous inferences from the utterances of a conversational partner, and incomplete information. This implies that misunderstandings in nonnative interactions are not different from native-to-native interaction – as differences in the interacting actors’ linguistic background and their levels of competence in using the secondary language, as the analyzed recordings have revealed, do not lead to the inception of misunderstanding within and during the encounter.

In the case of non-understandings, however, the cause is due to the construction of the utterance of the conversational partner – implying that linguistic factors play a role in the occurrence of non-understanding in nonnative interactions.

The repair of misunderstandings is usually initiated by the recipient of the problematic utterance, which enables the source of the trouble to execute the necessary correction to contain misunderstanding. Other-initiated repairs are also prominent in cases of non-understanding, where the party who recognizes his failure to process his partner’s utterance will also indicate the trouble, thereby allowing the speaker of the non-understood utterance to repair the trouble to accommodate the recipient of the utterance to reach understanding.

As shown in the analysis, repairing a non-understood utterance can be executed by repeating a statement, repeating and modifying the utterance, extending the meaning of an
ambiguous term, and describing a non-understood item or object being referred to during the talk.

The research also attempts to establish the notion of prevention as a strategy employed by the recipient of an utterance in an effort to avoid understanding problems, thus reaching complete understanding. In this case, however, the emphasis is that the caller resorts to ‘prevention’ during the consultation to prevent misunderstanding or not understanding the agent – especially when the caller is receiving pertinent information from the agent. With the notion of prevention of understanding problems in the conversation comes the production of preventative utterance – and the analysis shows that ‘prevention’ could be carried out either by requesting for confirmation of one’s understanding of the partner’s utterance or by requesting for a clarification in cases of uncertainty about the other agent’s utterance.

It is further revealed in this research that in conversations involving nonnative speakers of English, participants prefer not to focus on the language deficiencies of their partners, as errors are just allowed to pass uncorrected. In some instances, though, phonetic and lexical flaws are sometimes solved by self-repair.
FOREWORD

A number of kind and generous individuals have contributed significantly to the completion of this study. The researcher expresses his gratitude to the following:

Prof. Dr. Michael F. Steehouder – for his supervision, encouragement, and advice (as well as constructive criticisms) that have been crucial in challenging the researcher to pursue, improve, and complete this study; and

Drs. Gert W. Brinkman – for his valuable advice and constructive criticism of the research’s drafts for the substantial improvement of the study’s content and value.

Mr. Harold Borkent, Ms. Cecille Plomp, and Mr. Ard Koster of the ITC – User Support and Training Office – for facilitating the possibility for the researcher to gather substantial amount of necessary data; and

Mr. Steffen Bisgaard of SENTO, Enschede – for providing the researcher with access to a number of recordings needed to analyze calls made in a call center;

Mr. Johan Jonker of the Educational Media Unit – Behavioral Science Department of the University of Twente – for the crash course in the application of the necessary software and equipment for the analysis of the data.

Mr. Hans H. Kits for the substantial assistance and support – my sincerest thanks.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam

Ardion Beldad
31 August 2006
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1 INTRODUCTION

At times the documentation or, in layman’s term, the manual contained in the package of a gadget just purchased doesn’t suffice to help the consumer direct himself in the successful operation of the newly acquired ‘technological’ item. So when the attempt to proceed in the daunting mission of successfully connecting the cords and the plugs of the equipment gets tough, the new user is propelled to seek the consoling help of an inanimate manual.

However, when that manual, supposedly designed to aid the neophyte, could not even have the promise of relieving the same user from the complication of first getting around the item without the risk of damaging it before it serves any purpose, the user is then left desperately wishing for a better help. This prompts the inquiry on where he can run for the much needed aid.

The adventurous consumer may not even spare a time to consult the seemingly thick user’s guide, as his excitement to test his technical wits with an initial experience of handling the new equipment climaxes. Eventually he may triumph over the intricacies in the encounter with the newly bought equipment, but sooner would he realize that his sweeter affair with that big or little machine turns sour, as there are technical problems related to using the equipment that are beyond his control. Again, when the manual is not of any help at all, he ought to have a helping hand.

Just as things in modernized societies have shifted to interactivity, the ways of helping consumers deal with their technological artifacts have also evolved from the user’s interaction with the texts of the documentation to the reader’s interaction with a ‘flesh and blood’ source of the required technical assistance, either over the phone or through online communities with other users. Indeed, consumer help has allowed itself to have its own metamorphosis in due time, with so much credits showered into the continuous advances in the varied forms of communication technology.

So when the manual doesn’t appeal to the user in times of technical despair, he always has somebody to dial for a friendly advise on “how to” matters. The proliferation of company helpdesks and online help centers is phenomenal. With this, technology consumers who don’t find solace from printed documentations and user guides can have more personalized help from another breathing human being who is able to provide the required information of greater relevance to ameliorate the user’s life with his gadget and machinery.

Steehouder’s article (2002) explores the factors behind the gradual transition in technical help preference among the consumers of technology. He argues that this shift from paper-based help (in the forms of manuals) to interactive technical assistance (over the phone or online through web forums) is anchored on the increasing need for tailored-based information among consumers. Steehouder with Hartman (2003) proceed to elaborate five major reasons that are vital in understanding the shift that is referred to earlier. A portion in the next chapter of this research is allotted for a thorough discussion of what the authors believe are significant triggers to the eventual ‘evolution of help’.

At the macro level, individual consumers have all the possibilities to dial the appropriate call centers tasked to handle clients’ problems, specifically those that involved difficulties and complications in handling and operating different types of technological items - computer softwares and hardwares, digital cameras, video recorders, etc. Within an organization, technical breakdowns experienced by the personnel can be channeled to the designated helpdesk for the needed help.

The mushrooming of call centers designed to handle consumer’s complaints and inquiries in almost all countries is a strong argument that interactive customer support is racing to become another major enterprise in a ‘globalized’ world. Even at the organizational level, the existence of a department to handle technical problems within the group is of utmost importance.

Garnett, Mandelbaum, and Reiman (2002) advance that in recent decades there has been an explosive growth of companies that offer different kinds of services over the phone. Frenkel,
Tam, Korczynski, and Shire (1998) also point out that call centers are rapidly growing channels for service and sales delivery, particularly in the financial and telecom industries.

The economic consideration for the eventual upsurge of call centers and web-enabled service support centers in developing countries like India, Jamaica, and the Philippines is an important point mentioned in the report of Tanburn and Singh (2001).

In the words of Brown and Hagel (2005), emerging markets, with clear reference to China and India, are not only famed for assembling consumer electronics products, but are also the hot spots for the burgeoning call center industry that extends low-level customer support.

Such a trend proves how the lifting of trade barriers among nations has fueled the influx of interactive customer support in nonnative English speaking zones. With this phenomenon comes the requisite for a common language that will guarantee the effective transaction between an American client, for instance, and an Asian agent – whenever, wherever.

What is clear from the so-called shrinking of the what-used-to-be a big world, which the rapid growth of communication and transportation technology prompted, is the certainty in the phenomenal increase in the frequency of intergroup contact (Sarbaugh, 1988). Who can ever deny the interconnectedness between folks from Western Europe and the inhabitants of Southeast Asia or Northern Africa, for instance? Again thanks to the continuous advances in the technologies cited earlier which brought people ever closer despite geographic distances.

Although calls to helpdesks in the Netherlands are done mostly in Dutch, there is already a growing number of call centers that cater to the technical information needs of non-Dutch speaking clients who are either located in the country aforementioned or in another country. Organizations, too, such as educational institutions and multinational companies, have increased their usage of a common language to facilitate communication between parties with different first languages.

This research is primarily interested in studying the telephone conversations between individuals who are nonnative speakers of English. The interest lies on the assumption that when two bilingual communication actors interact using a common language (English) as a medium for message exchanges an interesting ‘transactional dynamics’ is bound to take place.

As Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, and Coupland (1988) note, when two people from different cultural groups come together, the encounter can sometimes be as smooth as silk; while the possibility for it to confront a series of obstacles and incompatibilities which can result to misunderstandings is inevitable.

Using conversational analysis as a procedure in making sense of data contained within different telephone calls obtained from a Dutch call center and a helpdesk of an educational institute, the research delves into the reality of misunderstanding and non-understanding in the interaction of nonnative speakers of English. The transactions, in this case, involved callers who are seeking for the necessary technical help from helpdesk agents over the phone.

The primary goal of this research is to provide answers to the following inquiries: (a) what are the factors behind the occurrence of misunderstandings in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative English speaking clients and agents, (b) how are these misunderstandings repaired and who initiates the repair, (c) what causes non-understanding in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative speakers of English, (d) who usually recognizes the inception of non-understandings in helpdesk conversations and how are they repaired, and (e) how do participants in helpdesk encounters prevent problems of misunderstandings.

An important feature of the study is the application of conversational analysis in making sense of the data that have been collected – and to address the research questions that have been specified.

The second chapter of this research presents a detailed discussion of relevant theories and studies that are selected and reviewed to provide theoretical substance to the scope of the research, while the third chapter dwells on the methodology employed for the conduct of this
research. Ten Have’s conversational analysis model (1999) provides the structure for the explication of the research methodology presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 is apportioned for the presentation and analysis of the data for the research. Data are in the form of short talk segments that are derived from recorded telephone calls made in a commercial call center and in the helpdesk of an educational institute, both located in Enschede, The Netherlands. A comprehensive summary of findings and a discussion of points as bases for further studies are contained in Chapter 5.

Transcriptions of recorded telephone calls used for analysis are included in the appendix section of this research.
2 DISCUSSION OF THEORIES AND RELEVANT RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, relevant studies and articles are surveyed in line with the problem statements of this research. The discussion starts with an overview of the transition of technical help from manuals to helpdesks, then the relationship between globalization and the internalization of helpdesks (call centers) is also established. The discussion continues with the global significance of English as a language of international business, including its usage as a primary medium for helpdesk and call center transactions.

In the second half of this chapter, the realities of misunderstandings and non-understandings as prominent problems inherent in intercultural encounters are explored. The discussion in this area, however, proceeds to the more general concepts of misunderstanding and non-understanding that are evident even in interactions between individuals who share the same ‘first language’.

The last section of this chapter is apportioned for a discussion of strategies people in an interaction used in dealing with misunderstandings and non-understandings. Primarily we dwell on the concept of repair, which has been of significant interest when studying the ways people deal with communication problems. Further, the concept of prevention is introduced, as the goal is to establish complete and correct understanding in conversational acts - particularly in helpdesk encounters.

2.1 The Evolution of Technical Help: From Paper to Phone

Introduction

An exhaustive discourse of the issues related to the use of the humble telephone as a bridge between the troubled customer and the source of the necessary technical help would be an unfounded discussion without an attempt to trace the metamorphosis that customer help and service has taken – from one-way communication in the form of manuals to two-way communication through interactive and personalized services offered by helpdesks. In this sub-chapter the discussion centers on the issues related to the use of manuals, the reasons for the sudden increase in the popularity of helpdesks, and the problems with seeking for technical help over the phone.

2.1.1 Have manuals been displaced?

Whatever is happening to the aging form of technical help via traditional manuals is an interesting inquiry that merits an exhaustive investigation. It is not surprising anymore to hear a product customer complaining about the predicaments he experienced when using the manual for an appliance or a computer just bought. Although there are still friendlier paper-based user help systems out in the market, the cornucopia of badly designed documentations is also exasperating for those who refuse to start operating their gadgets without religiously consulting the information-filled manual.

It is known, however, that when it comes to manual usage, two worlds can be created – one which is occupied by those who read first before ever having the slightest interaction with the equipment and the other with beings who jumped right ahead into action without even opening the documentation. Authors like Carroll and Rosson (1987) argue that reading is one thing users at every level of experience try to evade. This avoidance, they contend, is anchored on the premise that “users who need to learn something will be willing to read about it, to practice skills in a sensibly structured sequence of exercises, and finally assemble these conceptual and skill components into a mature competence and understanding.”
Adult users, Brockman (1990) forwards, would still skip ahead and try to use a system without even reading a well-written and well-designed manual. He furthers that these users are constantly guessing about what should and should not happen with a new system as soon as they begin learning.

Positioned on the other side of the pole are those who stick to the rule of ‘reading first before acting’ or the alternative tenet of ‘reading while acting’. Mehlenbacher (2003) refutes the claim that nobody reads documentation, calling the said argument an oversimplification. He continues that users don’t read documentation unless they know they need it – and when they do read documentation, they skip, scan, and skim. In the same vein, Lodor (1999) suggests that what prompts a user to refer to documentation is his need to recover from an error or to exploit the technology at hand.

Lodor’s argument that users want control over their own activities synchronizes with the ‘action-oriented’ principle of manuals designed according to the minimalist tradition. It may be apt to concede that ‘minimalism’ (Carroll, 1998) was once hailed as the promised redeemer of manuals from the quicksand of non-readership among users – that with the application of minimalist principles in manual design comes the assurance that readers would still bother to read the lowly ‘user’s guide’ while giving in to the whim of executing things with whatever technological artifact there is.

It is clear that the field of technical communication has been pushing innovations to fully support product consumers through documentations and manuals. However, it is also undeniable that these same consumers may find the paper-based help (or even the online help) available to be insufficient in aiding them deal with technical troubles that can arise in their constant interaction with the equipment or gadget. So when the traditional manual is incapable of eliminating the problem, the phone is a ready reinforcement to connect the technically troubled user to the so-called source of a better help – the helpdesk.

2.1.2 When helpdesks take the front seat

For customers of commercial softwares, for instance, worries about where to get the necessary technical help can be shrugged off as most vendors of these products offer telephone-based hotline services to assist flustered customers and users deal with their technical problems (Pentland, 2001).

According to Poulodi, Perry, and Saini (1999), maintenance of market viability and survival in an environment where competition is tough requires organizations to exploit their resources to the maximum. A case to illustrate this point is the use of network technology as a form of internal and external communication. The authors point out that with information technology, organizations are able to provide online interactive support and phone-based help systems to their customers.

In clear resonance to the point of Pouloudi et al. is the view of Das (2003) on the organizational value of technical support, which the latter claims is not only a competitive necessity for high-technology vendors but also a potential source of revenue in markets where profits from product sales are increasingly restricted by price competition. He adds that a productive technical support function can improve the sales revenue as well as the profitability of the firm.

Technical support, Das describes, begins with a reporting of a problem by a user and ends with the problems being solved through the coordinated activity of one or more technical support personnel. As Govindaraju (2002) stresses out, helpdesks have long been the standard source for end-user computing support. However, it should be noted that helpdesks that are spread across the globe have also been dealing with problems related to the use of various appliances and equipment.
What could have triggered the shift in the preference for technical help among customers and user of technology products? Steehouder (2002) maintains that as customers are becoming increasingly selective in their processing of information, they also want tailor-made information – quick and easy answers to their individual questions. This trend, the author continues, is responsible for spurring organizations to transform their customer support from distributive to responsive, from sender-driven to audience-driven, from push to pull.

Steehouder and Hartman (2003) also spell out five key reasons why customers would opt to make a call to a helpdesk in times of technical distress. The first point affirms the help seeker’s need for tailored information, which as always is not possible in traditional technical documentation. If the documentation falls short in containing the information requirement of the user, he is then pushed to seek personal help – and the phone becomes a ready connection to the source of the much needed aid.

A third factor motivating users to make a call for technical help is the possibility for them to formulate their problems in their own terminologies and language, sparing them from the nuisance of locating the right entries in the index. The fact that phone-based help is interactive is another reason for the user’s preference to solicit assistance from a helpdesk (or a call center).

Steehouder and Hartman suggest that the interaction between the help seeker and the help provider can be characterized as a form of coaching, where the latter can give feedback to the former. In this case, the helpdesk agent can rectify incorrect operations by the caller (the user), as well he can also dole out extra advice whenever the user can do something more properly. In another report, Steehouder (2002) cites that people are becoming accustomed to interactive and individualized forms of communication.

The interpersonal approach of the phone-based help is the last identified factor for the gradual shift of choices in technical help. As Steehouder and Hartman underscore, talking with people is more pleasant than consulting a technical documentation.

What has been mentioned as a form of evolution in technical help can be analyzed using the Media Richness Theory of Daft and Lengel (1986). A major claim of the theory is that communication media vary in their capacity to process rich information. Citing the earlier work of Daft with Wiginton (1979), Daft and Lengel advance that four criteria determine the ‘richness’ of a medium: its capacity for immediate feedback, the number of cues and channels utilized, personalization, and language variety.

Placing different communication media in a hierarchy, documents (both personal and impersonal) are positioned lower than telephone, but the latter is just below face-to-face communication (Daft and Lengel, 1986). As Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (2001) cite, the tailing of telephone behind face-to-face in terms of richness ranking is due to the filtering out of visual cues and body language in telephone interaction.

The telephone, though, they add, has fast feedback capability and individuals who resort to this medium rely on language content and audio cues (such as tone of voice) to convey messages and reach understanding. It is furthered that the personal character of the telephone medium and its use of natural language contribute to its richness.

Daft and Lengel (1986) accentuate that rich media, which allow rapid feedback and enable the exchange of multiple cues, are appropriate for rich information transactions so that communicative agents are able to frame a common interpretation of the things discussed. The fundamental idea is that richer media are necessary for equivocal communication tasks. They add that when communication is low in equivocality, lean media such as paper-based information source would be sufficient. With reference to the previous writings by Weick (1979) and Daft and Macintosh (1981), Daft and Lengel write that equivocality means ambiguity – the existence of multiple and conflicting interpretations about an organizational situation.

In the case of interactive user support, it is apt to claim that both the help seeker and the technical agent are bound to engage in a highly equivocal transaction. Singh, Twidale, and Rathi (2006) advance that on a basic level, a telephone conversation is typically less effort for the help-
seeker, and allows ambiguities to be identified, queried, and rectified much more easily than with textual interactions.

The appropriateness of a richer medium, such as a telephone, for helpdesk encounters or transactions is based on the premise that the caller has a very equivocal problem since he does not usually understand the nature of the problem of his device or system.

Certainly, phone-based help system is richer than the traditional technical documentation, but this newer form of technical help also is deprived of that element which makes face-to-face consulting richer – non-verbal messages, which Bucher (1981) supposes are sometimes very important clues in solving the problem of the help seeker.

2.1.3 The constraints of obtaining help through the phone

Previously the discussion was centered on the many factors that have triggered the shift in the preference for technical support. An important point to consider is the pervasiveness of telephone help and how it has overshadowed the traditional form of customer guide in the usage of a technological artifact. However, it is also noteworthy to apportion a space to detail out the limitations of acquiring help over the phone.

Kiesler, Zdaniuk, Lundmark, and Kraut (2000) hail the availability of customer support lines to address people’s questions, but recognize the fact these services impose attention, monetary, and psychological costs that inhibit people from using them. The problem, however, with phone-based help system goes beyond the usual financial alibi. Some deeper concerns simply need to be taken into account.

In telephone consulting, Bucher (1981) writes, the consultant is missing some important clues such as ‘botched output’, the program listing, the exact syntax of the error message, and even the all-important mannerisms of the user. He adds that these things are simply not transmitted over the phone and they can be significant for the consultant in his attempt to deal with the user’s trouble.

Unlike face-to-face communication, telephone conversation doesn’t enable interacting individuals to share the same environment (Backhaus, 1997). In a telephone conversation, he cites, the telephone conversant can only report to his telephone communicant his presently experienced environmental space – a space which is not directly shared by the communicant.

In the usual telephone consulting, the help provider or the ‘technical consultant’ may ask the help seeker or the caller to perform an action in relation to the complaint raised – it could be that the former would instruct the latter to push a button or to click an icon on the computer screen. In this typical situation, the help provider can only rely on the verbal reporting of the help seeker that he is indeed doing the requested action, but the technical consultant over the phone could not have an exact picture of what really is transpiring in the caller’s environment. It could be that the caller reports that he has already executed the necessary action, but actually has a difficulty in correctly acting out.

What Backhaus claims, in relation to the hypothetical case just presented, is that talking on the phone limits ‘interactants’ from engaging in the immediate environment of bodily presence. It is further pointed out that what is derived from the telephone conversation is a temporally immediate report that could have been shaped by the reporter’s subjectivity. The author stresses out that the report could just as well be an ‘imagined environment’.

The case from Backhaus is also a clear illustration of an interaction with a missing (situational) common ground, which, according to Steenhoud and Brinkman (2006), is compensated for by communicants every time they perform the act of grounding. Clark and Brennan (1991) stress out that the importance of grounding is founded on its crucial role in keeping coordination in track – where coordination between and among interacting participants is a necessity in communication as a collective activity – whether that same communication is face-to-face or over the phone.
A different scenario can be created in a face-to-face technical consulting because both the help seeker and the help provider share the same environment, making it possible for one to see what the other is doing thereby allowing immediate rectification if an action seems erroneous. Giving credence to this claim is Backhaus’ contention that in the shared environment of face-to-face, individuals can act in the environment together, perhaps in concert, modifying features of the shared space in each other’s presence – an enabling those same interacting participants to coordinate their actions accordingly.

Over the phone, Backhaus continues, communicants could not physically act together to modify an environment; but the meaning-context may be such that it leads one of the parties to act in his own primary environment.

Summary

What is apparent in the discussion presented is the inevitability in the gradual transformation of technical help that customers can get after purchasing any form of technological good out in the market. Although the traditional paper-based help forms or ‘how to’ systems are still widely used, they are slowly replaced by interactive approaches to technical help such as helpdesks.

The factors behind the sudden shift in the customers’ preference for help have been detailed out, and as already known, an important driving force for this shift in preference is the element of richness that can be derived from using the phone for technical help which makes it more interactive and more appropriate for highly equivocal tasks that mostly characterized helpdesk conversations.

However, the use of the telephone in bridging the troubled customer and the source of technical help is not at all blissful, as there are certainly limitations in using help over the phone that need serious consideration.

2.2 Helpdesks in the Borderless Global Market

Introduction

Before heading to the main issue of misunderstanding and non-understanding in the usage of a common language in helpdesk transactions, it makes perfect sense to tackle the reality of globalization and how it has undeniably served as an impetus for the widespread use of English in the interaction between clients and agents who are in the different sides of a language divide. This subchapter contains a brief discussion of the concept of globalization and how it has prompted the phenomenon of offshoring, which is primarily responsible for the exportation of call center jobs to developing countries.

2.2.1 The concept of globalization

Globalization prompts the freer flow of goods, services, and factors of production between countries (Jaffee, 2005). With the increasing globalization of the world economy, poverty is reduced on a worldwide scale and the standards of living of people are increased (Russell, 2005).

Russell forwards that globalization and free trade offer substantial benefits in three ways: (1) both are influential weapons in fighting to reduce poverty, (2) both strongly promote democracy and act as important antidote to endemic corruption and social injustice in the developing world, and (3) both create better paying jobs worldwide

2.2.2 Offshoring as a consequence of globalization
Jaffee claims that in the labor sector, opposition to globalization is fuelled by that fear that jobs are being transferred to foreign locations – in this case jobs from developed countries are relocated to developing countries. In the words of Levy (2005), arbitrage in international labor markets launches a new wave of offshoring – whereby firms are able to shift work to wherever wages are lower. As Tanburn and Singh (2001), Agrawal, Farrell, and Remes (2003), and Venkatraman (2004) point out, cost is the primary driving force for enterprises and firms from developed countries to migrate business processes overseas to developing countries such as India, The Philippines, Malaysia, China, and South Africa.

In a report by Friedland (2005), it is written that in order for offshoring to be successful, two criteria have to be met: first, that the functions can either be digitized or handled by telephone; and second, that appropriate skills are available or easily developed at the offshoring center. That same report goes on citing that the first jobs to be offshored are lower value jobs such as call centers, back-end processing, and accounting. It is also mentioned that jobs are mostly offshored to countries where English is either the main business language, or where there are large English-speaking population.

Agrawal, Farrell, and Remes (2005) further that, in the case of the call center industry, companies in the United States and Great Britain, which account for about 70 percent of the business-process-offshoring market, can take advantage of the sizeable English-speaking populations in many low-wage countries such as India, the Philippines, and South Africa. With a shared language, they cite, errors are far less likely and functions that require voice interaction or text-based work are straightforward.

**Summary**

It makes sense to state a definitive claim that the advent of globalization is primarily responsible for the phenomena of offshoring – the shipping of transferable jobs (including those in the call center industry) from developed countries to developing states. This offshoring, of course, also requires the use of a common language to enable the call transactions between parties with varied mother tongues.

### 2.3 The Use of English as a Common Language in Intercultural Interactive User Support

**Introduction**

Now that the relation between the widespread use of English as the language of the global economy and the phenomenon of offshoring has been discussed in the previous section, it is now apt to have a closer look at the significant roles of English in the many domains of human societies in the 21st century. First, the discussion focuses on the prevalence of English in the different arenas of human activities; then the subchapter proceeds to explore the consequential problems of using English as a second language.

#### 2.3.1 A common language – storming the Tower of Babel

In multilingual service encounter, the service provider’s convergence to the service seeker’s displayed language is recognized as one of the many ways in realizing the goal of personalizing services among many businesses and organizations (Torras, 2005). It is furthered that the service provider has to realize that good service may lie in accepting the service seeker’s medium at the cost of smooth communication rather in choosing the most ‘effective’ medium.
It is for this reason that the English language has been fully exploited in bridging the
transaction between a native speaker service seeker (from the United States or Britain, for
instance) and a nonnative English speaking service provider who may be stationed in a non-
English speaking country. In some cases, the transaction could be between two nonnative
speakers who need to collaborate to provide solutions to a particular technical problem. Such a
scenario is also common in organizations and firms whose members have different ‘mother
tongues’ – therefore, in this case, English is a welcome redemption for inter-ethnic, inter-lingual
interaction to be salvaged from the proverbial Tower of Babel.

English, as a language, has gained its reputation as a world language – a title once shared
with Spanish and French (Hjarvard, 2004). While Altbach (2004) believes that English is
supplanting such languages as French, German, and Spanish as the international medium of
scholarship; Block (2004) also emphasizes that it has become the language of international
banking, global consumerism, celebrity and popular culture, and international banking. It is also
worth noting that English is already the universal language of business (Tanburn & Singh, 2001)

According to Altbach, English is both the most widely studied foreign language in the
world and the most widely used second language. He adds that in many countries, it is the
second language, and it is the second language of choice almost without exception. In congruence
with the said claim is Hjarvard’s contention that English is the language people use whenever
they wish to communicate with others outside their own linguistic communities.

As Firth (1996) accentuates, in many instances English is used as a lingua franca, in which
case none of the interactants involved has the language as their mother tongue. Norrick (1991)
also notes that in many parts of the world, people routinely engaged in conversations in which at
least one participant must speak a language other than his mother tongue – often with a facility
significantly different from that of the native.

2.3.2 The problems with intercultural communication using a secondary language

Nayar (1991) suggests that communication in English nowadays can be categorized in four types:
(1) native speaker(NS) and native speaker; (2) non-native speaker (NNS) and non-native speaker
both internationally and intra-nationally using English as a language of wider communication
(e.g. Swedes and Ethiopians, Bengalis and Tamils) (3) NS and NNS in NS country (e.g. foreign
dignitaries, tourists or students in the United States); Intercultural and (4) NS and NNS in NNS’s
territory (e.g. U.S. defense personnel or experts abroad).

It has been previously noted that the rapid growth of technologies of communication and
transportation served as an impetus for the phenomenal increase in intergroup contact (Sarbourgh,
1988). The stress on intergroup contact significantly implies the pervasiveness of intercultural
communication since mankind discovered that the world is not flat at all. According to Collier
(1989), interacting participants’ affirmation of their differences in cultural terms and their creation
of impressions of each other as having different cultural identities are accountable for the
progression of their communication act from cultural to intercultural.

Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, and Coupland (1988) hold that the encounter between
two individuals from different cultural backgrounds may proceed very smoothly, although
oftentimes that same encounter could be confronted by obstacles and incompatibilities that
eventually could result to misunderstanding, hostility, and an increase in prejudice.

Kurhila (2001) further affirms the previous assertions by citing that when the participants
in an encounter don’t have equal access to the language of the exchange, they can face
interactional problems that are absent or only rarely found in conversations between native
speakers. These problems, Deen (1995) hints, may be caused by cultural differences which also
lead to diverging expectations concerning the content, goals, and process of the interaction.
However, Deen believes that aside from the factors mentioned, another notable source of communication problems may be the nonnative speaker’s limited second language proficiency – further implying that the problem is not intercultural but also interlingual. Indeed, it can be aptly said that, to a large extent, differences in the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of individuals are accountable for the transpiration of misunderstandings in any communicative act.

Several researchers (Agliati, Vescovo, & Anolli, 2005; Weigand, 1999; Seedhouse, 1998; Banks, Ge, & Baker, 1991; Forgas, 1988) have substantiated the inevitable that culture shapes communication. Weigand (1999) quotes that since communication is culturally determined, it is just typical for various cases of misunderstanding to crop up in the course of the interaction due to differences in the interactant’s language and culture – thereby allowing ample space for communication difficulties. What Gass and Varonis (1991) claim is that when ‘interlocutors’ do not share the same natural language or the same sociocultural rules of discourse, the possibility for miscommunication is profound.

Wiegand (1999), however, admits that cross-cultural communication problems can be observed not only between speakers of different languages or in conversations between native and non-native speakers – as even within the same language it is possible to find different cultural frames belonging to different varieties. In connection to the previous argument, it is also pointed out that communicative problems may also result from the different cultural roles interactants have within the community.

The issue of misunderstanding and non-understanding are of significant interest for this research because its primary objective is to look into the problems or troubles that can surface within the transaction involving nonnative speakers or between a native and a nonnative speaker over the phone, as they attempt to solve a particular technical problem. Another area that deserves attention in this study is the mechanism which interacting individuals employ in handling communication problems during the transaction.

As O’Donnell and Sefton (1995) state, people enter into interactions to achieve a particular goal, or, in the words of O’Connell, Kowal, and Kaltenbacher (1990), human conversations are initiated to fulfill varied purposes. However, for the goals or objectives of the ‘interlocutors’ to be realized, communication has to be successful (O’Connell et al, 1990) and effective (Marshall & Novick, 1995); and Rapaport (2003) argues that achieving success in communication requires the interacting parties to detect misunderstandings and correct them by negotiating. Hirst et al (1994) share the same perspective by maintaining that any dialogue system must account for the detection and repair of misunderstanding.

**Summary**

The points discussed in this subchapter slant to the current reality that with globalization comes the requisite for a common language, in this case English, for different transactions on a global scale. However, the admission that the use of a common language in so many cross-cultural encounters can be problematic is emphasized in this subchapter.

The discussion in this subchapter shapes the research’s interest in exploring conversations involving nonnative speakers of English. The focus is primarily on nonnative conversations over the phone – within the context of helpdesk encounters, where both the agent and the client transact using a secondary language.
2.4 When Minds Don’t Meet: The Troubles of Communication

Introduction

After an exhaustive discussion of the gradual metamorphosis of technical help and the phenomenal proliferation of interactive user support systems on a global system employing most of the time a common language, in most cases English, it is now appropriate to commence a detailed discourse of the problems that people encounter whenever they enter into a communicative act on an intercultural level using the English language.

For this research, however, the interest is on the inevitability of misunderstanding and non-understanding when individuals communicate using a language that is not primarily their own – a second language, to be linguistically correct. This section, therefore, is devoted to an explication of the diverging views on misunderstanding and non-understanding, a differentiation between misunderstanding and miscommunication, and the ‘roots’ of these communication flaws.

Before this subchapter ends, a discussion of the concept and nature of non-understanding is presented, as we also draw the line between misunderstanding and non-understanding.

2.4.1 The inevitability of conversational problems

From the previous discussion, it is apparent that the smooth flow of communication may eventually stumble as misunderstanding and non-understanding creep in. What we are definitely aware of is the certainty that conversational glitches are unavoidable in any conversational activity. Norrick (1991) insists that irregularities in our daily talk-in-interaction could be in the form of mispronunciation, self-contradiction, and confusion with facts.

Nevertheless, it is always our noble goal that whenever we perform a communicative act, we also expect to be understood (Dascal & Berenstein, 1987). As Weigand (1993) underscores, the general function of communication must be considered as the function of coming to an understanding.

However, one realization to consider, at this point in time, is that communication, according to Schneider (2000), is possible if only individual subjects are able to understand the intended meaning of each other’s utterances. To this we can add that a ‘display of understanding’ is a consequence of one participant in the interaction producing a response that is consistent and coherent with the utterance of the other (McRoy & Hirst, 1995; Hirst et al. 1994).

This discussion proceeds with Agliati, Vescovo, and Anolli (2005) suggesting that in order to produce, share, and understand the meaning of the utterances’ flow, conversation or interaction participants should act together - taking into consideration what the interlocutor communicates in verbal or nonverbal way, and participating to the development of a given meaning path.

2.4.2 Are misunderstanding and miscommunication one and the same?

Whenever a discussion on misunderstanding is raised, it is also not unusual to include the issue of miscommunication on the agenda. Nevertheless, it is of utmost significance to establish the distinctions between misunderstanding and miscommunication. Several authors offer different definitions for the concepts just mentioned.

In the cosmos of academicians and authors, Gass and Varonis (1991) cite, there is even little consistency in defining misunderstanding, miscommunication, and, even, communication breakdown.

Weigand (1999) defines misunderstanding as a form of understanding that is partially or totally deviant from what the speaker intended to communicate. For Hirst et al. (1994), misunderstanding is that instance when a participant (in the interaction) obtains an interpretation
that he believes is complete and correct, but which is however, not the one that the other speaker intended him to obtain.

In Grimshaw’s definition (1988), misunderstanding is a two-stage process in which the hearer experiences understanding, the first stage, and then deliberately fails to do (or give evidence of believing), the second stage. Milroy (1984) describes misunderstanding as the disparity between the speaker’s and the hearer’s semantic analysis of a given utterance.

For Reilly (1991), miscommunication is any form of misunderstanding or misinterpretation that ultimately leads to a disruption in the flow of dialogue and to explicit corrective action by the dialogue participants. Milroy (1984) defines this said communication problem as the occurrence of a mismatch between the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s interpretation.

Weigand (1999) posits that as a term, miscommunication may prove its utility when used to describe cases where misunderstanding is not corrected. She adds that with miscommunication, communication proceeds without the interlocutors’ knowledge that they are no longer addressing each other – the hearer not knowing that he has misunderstood and the speaker not recognizing the misunderstanding clearly. Her view on miscommunication is rather straightforward – that it characterizes communication that fails to achieve its purpose of understanding.

Although Reilly notes that miscommunication is a form of misunderstanding, Gass and Varonis (1991) offer a rather divergent view. They forward that as one of the major types of problematic communication (the other being non-engagement), miscommunication can be subcategorized into two: misunderstanding and incomplete understanding.

In a study of NS-NSSS communication, Gonzales-Lloret (2005) proffers a classification of miscommunication into two: grammatical and socio-cultural. Grammatical miscommunication, she defines, includes the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and prosodic systems of the languages; while sociocultural miscommunication occurs when a native speaker tends to attribute nonnative speaker a knowledge of sociolinguistic rules of interaction based on a demonstration of familiarity with the purely linguistic rules.

Gass and Varonis (1991) presents a schematic representation of communication problems – and it is shown that miscommunication is one major type, which further include two subtypes: misunderstanding and incomplete understanding, where non-understanding belongs.

**Figure 1** Classification of Communication Problems

To settle the differences in meaning between miscommunication and misunderstanding, we will conform to the notion that miscommunication is a broader category of problematic communication (Gass and Varonis, 1991) – and in that category fall the problems of misunderstanding and non-understanding.
Later in this chapter, the distinction between misunderstanding and non-understanding will be established, although at this point, it is also logical to explore the causes of misunderstanding in conversational acts.

2.4.3 The factors behind misunderstanding

Speech acts misunderstandings, McRoy and Hirst (1995) suggest, occur when two participants (in interaction) differ in their understanding of the discourse role of some utterance. What Ardissono, Boella, and Damiano (1998) point out is that misunderstanding is a result when the coherence of the dialogue is lost - especially when the premise is that interacting individuals are cooperating and that every turn is performed to jointly succeed in their goals.

However, a review of available literature on human interaction reveals that obstacles to effective and successful communication, such as misunderstanding and non-understanding, are inexorably fated. The ideal, of course, is the attainment of ‘perfect understanding’, which, as Dascal and Berenstein (1987) claim, is possible only when the mind of one party is completely manipulable by the other, or when one is able to position oneself fully in the point of view of the other.

Weigand (1999) label the two primary causes of misunderstanding as linguistic means and cognitive means. Oftentimes, she claims, the linguistic means used by speaker are not correctly identified by the interlocutor – as speaking is bound to situational (e.g. acoustic and perceptual conditions). With acoustic as a factor, she cites that that there might be noises in the environment that distract the interacting parties from identifying phonological sequences.

Our knowledge of habits and similar inferences, Weigand continues, are examples of cognitive means. She argues that habits are not valid for every case, and that inferences are not always conventional, as they also represent presumptions that are dependent on all the differences that might exist between the world of the speaker and that of the listener. She also notes that when interlocutors rely on their knowledge of habits, they may rely on different cognitive means and may, therefore, construct flawed inferences.

In communication, Weigand further pronounces, not everything is explicitly said – which spurs interacting individuals to nearly always make inferences, thereby implying that they have accounted not only for conventions but also for suggestions and presumptions. She contends that not everything is expressed in communication for reasons of ‘economy in language’ and because interacting individuals are not always aware of every piece of information necessary for clear understanding.

Bazzanella and Damiano (1999) offer a systematic categorization of misunderstanding ‘triggers’. First it is notable that they employ the term “triggers” instead of factors, with a justification that the former don’t assume a deterministic role in predisposing communication to a negative outcome. These so-called triggers are categorized into four: structural, speaker-related, interlocutor-related, and those related to the interaction between the participants.

Structural triggers, they say, include disturbances along the communicative channel, similarities between elements of the linguistic code, troubles caused by the use of a foreign language, and structural; meanwhile, triggers related to the speaker are subcategorized into two – local factors (speaker’s slips of the tongue and the use of ambiguous forms) and global factors (referring to the structuring of information, both on the pragmatic and syntactic level).

Knowledge problems (e.g. false beliefs and lexical incompetence) and cognitive processes (e.g. wrong inferences and cognitive load), the researchers forward, are examples of triggers related to the interlocutor. Further, triggers related to the interaction between the participants could be in the forms of non-shared knowledge and focusing problems.

The list of triggers appears appalling and Bazzanella and Damiano even mention that one or more of these factors can appear at a certain moment in an interaction, making the process of understanding more difficult, although not necessarily resulting to misunderstanding.
Borrowing the phrase ‘triggers of misunderstanding from the researchers previously cited, Bou-Franch (2002) argues that the occurrence of these triggers can be attributed to external sources and the participants in the conversation. External sources that thrust misunderstanding include disturbing background noise and/or troubles related to the use of a foreign language. It is also noted that participants in the interaction themselves, both speaker and listener, can cause misunderstandings. The speaker is responsible for misunderstanding, for instance, if he holds back necessary information that the listener has to know for him to make sense of what has been spoken. In another case, Bou-Franch continues, the speaker may also ‘miscalculate’ the ability of the listener to interpret meaning to the provided cues.

Bou-Franch insinuates that the listener, too, can be blamed for misunderstanding, especially if he has not been listening; although it is also possible that he may not have heard what has been said. Another unavoidable circumstance, she adds, is when the listener has a difficulty in understanding and recognizing part of the speaker’s utterance, the meaning of some words, or, even, he has the linguistic deficiency in interpreting ‘intonational’ contours.

In one of his articles, however, Schegloff (1987) admits that misunderstanding in talk-in-interaction has more sources than the bases of social, cultural, and linguistic differentiation. Even in interaction between persons from different groupings, he adds, the occurrence of misunderstanding is not necessarily traceable to their cultural or linguistic differences.

Another radical view comes from Kreuz and Roberts (1993), who insist that errors in conversation, which in this case could be understood as akin to the causes of misunderstandings, go beyond phonological and lexical errors. Their contention is that another error can occur beyond sound and word level. This error, which they call pragmatic, refers to the breakdown of the social and contextual component of a discourse.

Banks, Ge, and Baker (1991) concede to the idea that misunderstandings are not accidental, as they reason out that misunderstandings do not occur as ‘agentless mysteries’. Their view is that one or more participants and their circumstances of interaction are ultimately accountable for misunderstanding. McRoy and Hirst (1995) advance that although interacting individuals may not always recognize a misunderstanding when it occurs, they are aware that misunderstanding can occur.

Such a finding leads McRoy and Hirst to classify misunderstandings according to which participant recognizes that the misunderstanding has occurred and whom he thinks has misunderstood. The first kind, self-misunderstandings, they cite, are those in which a hearer finds that a speaker’s current utterance is inconsistent with something that the speaker has said earlier, and instead decides that his own interpretation of the earlier utterance must be correct. Drummond and Hopper (1991) also term this type as ‘self-attributed misunderstanding’.

They define the second type, other misunderstandings, or other-attributed misunderstandings in the lexicon of Drummond and Hopper, as that instance when the hearer attributes a misunderstanding to the speaker. Hirst et al (1994) disclose that ‘other misunderstandings’ occur when a participant recognizes that if one of his acts had been interpreted differently, the other’s utterance would have been the expected response to it – eventually prompting the participant to try to change the other’s interpretation.

An elaboration of the causes of misunderstanding leads to first question for this study: what form does misunderstanding take when nonnative speakers of English enter into a conversational activity in the context of a helpdesk encounter?

2.4.2 How different is non-understanding from misunderstanding?

Since the research fundamental interest is to look into the cases of misunderstanding and non-understanding in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative English clients and agents, it is just necessary to also understand the nature of non-understanding. In this section, instances of
non-understanding and misunderstanding are presented to formally distinguish one from the other.

Allwood and Abelar (1984) define non-understanding, or lack or understanding, as an instance during the conversation when a receiver cannot connect incoming information with stored information. Young’s (1999) definition of non-understanding seems to be aligned with that of Allwood and Abelar when he points out that non-understanding exists when observers realize that they do not understand the action of others.

Non-understanding, or lack of understanding as Allwood and Abelar call it, can be attributed to two factors: missing relevant information and missing strategies for relevant connection.

Non-understanding, according to Weigand (1999), cannot be regarded as a form of understanding – as it refers to difficulties in understanding. In the terms of Bazanella and Damiano (1999), non-understanding conflicts with misunderstanding since the first concept implies that in the course of the conversation no comprehension has been achieved; while Hirst et al (1994) equate ‘not understanding’ with the participant’s failure to find any complete and unique interpretation of an utterance.

The difference between misunderstanding and non-understanding is that with non-understanding someone who is experiencing it during the conversation is aware that he has a difficulty in understanding (Young, 1991; Weigand, 1999; Hirst et al 1994).

Consider the example below which illustrates the failure of the hearer to understand a lexical element in the utterance of the speaker. This particular case of misunderstanding involves a nonnative speaker and a native speaker.

1. NNS : and they have the chwach there
2. NS : the what?
3. NNS : the chwach …I know someone that…
4. NS : what does it mean?
5. NNS : like um like American people they always go there every Sunday, you
6. NS : know ….every morning that
7. NS : yes?
8. NNS : there pr- that – the American people get dressed up to go to um chwach
9. NS : oh to church… I see

(from Pica, 1988, as cited in Gass & Varonis, 1991)

The native speaker signals his difficulty in understanding the nonnative speaker’s ‘chwach’, in line 1, by responding with ‘the what?, in line 2,’ which eventually functions as the first deployment of an other-initiated repair (which will be discussed in the proceeding subchapter). In the NNS turn, he repeats the non-understood ‘chwach’, in line 3, with an attempt to say something about it. This time again, the NS displays his failure to understand the term, thereby prompting him to position the second other-initiated repair (what does it mean?), in line 4, which the NNS immediately responds to by trying to add information to have his ‘chwach’ understood by the NS – as indicated in lines 5 and 6.

Eventually after the NNS has completed his description of the term, the NS resorts to other-correction by emphasizing that the NNS’ ‘chwach’ is actually ‘church, in line 9’. This demonstrates that non-understanding occurs when one participant has a trouble in connecting newly acquired information with his stored information. In this case, the non-understood ‘chwach’ is a term that the NS has not previously stored in his ‘mental depot’. The segment also supports the argument that in non-understanding the participant who is confronted by it is aware of the problem.

The next segment shows an example of misunderstanding, and in this case it is caused by the recipient’s flawed interpretation of the purpose of the speaker’s utterance.
1  A  :  I wonder if we’ve forgotten anyone.
2  B  :  Did you invite the Mooneys?
3  A  :  Mm hm
4  B  :  Can you get me the cake recipe?
5  A  :  It’s on the shelf above the stove
6  B  :  It’s not there.
7  →  A  :  Do you want to ask Karin?
8  →  B  :  Isn’t she going to be out of town?
9  →  A  :  No, I mean ask for the recipe.

(from Hirst et al., 1994)

In the segment, the A and B are discussing about people they would be inviting for a ‘party’ and the exchange of turn proceeds normally from lines 1 to 3. Eventually the subject matter changed as B requests A to get the cake recipe for her, in line 4, which A responds to, in line 5, by saying that the recipe is on the shelf. B claims, in line 6, that the recipe is not on the shelf, thus A replies by asking B if she wants to ask Karin.

A interprets B’s utterance in line 8 as inappropriate, thus she repairs her previous utterance in line 9 to indicate that B has just misunderstood her. According to the interpretation of Hirst et al. (1994), after the utterance in line 7, B must have thought that A is planning to resume an earlier topic in the conversation (about who else to invite in the party), but A is only intending to continue the current topic (regarding the cake recipe).

The marked portion of the segment (from line 7 to 9) is an example of the claim that in cases of misunderstanding, the participant who misunderstands does not recognize that he is experiencing a problem.

The discussion just presented results to the formulation of the second problem for this research: what causes non-understandings in helpdesk encounters involving non-native English speakers and how they are repaired?

Summary

Misunderstandings and non-understanding are both inevitable in human conversations, either as intracultural or intercultural. Although a degree of confusion revolves around the terms misunderstanding and miscommunication, it has been established that they are not different at all. One claim even stresses out that misunderstanding, along with non-understanding, is a subclass of miscommunication, which is a theoretical formulation that this research is subscribing to.

Researchers offer varied explanations for the occurrence of misunderstanding and these factors can be classified as socio-cultural, linguistic, and pragmatic. The discussion on non-understanding clearly sets the boundary between this conversational problem and misunderstanding.

2.5 Prevent or repair: What people do to deal with problems of misunderstanding and non-understanding

Introduction

The previous subchapter has clearly shown that misunderstandings and non-understandings are inevitable in everyday conversations. This fact eventually leads to an exploration of the strategies that participants in an interaction use to handle the two aforementioned conversational problems. In this section, the concept of repair as one possible strategy in handling problems of misunderstanding and non-understanding is tackled.
The discussion moves to an investigation of the types of repair (self-initiated and other-initiated) and the mechanisms in the execution of repair, which eventually leads to a review of related literature about repairs in intercultural encounters. This subchapter ends with a discussion of the concept of prevention as another strategy in dealing with misunderstanding and non-understanding – although the emphasis is that prevention is used to avoid the possible occurrence of misunderstanding and non-understanding in the conversation.

2.5.1 Defining ‘repair’

Although the concept of ‘correction’ has been used in some sources (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993; Norrick, 1991) to refer to an attempt by either the speaker or the hearer to handle and remedy conversational errors, the term ‘repair’, which Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks coined in the late 70s, can be said to have gained wider usage in the domain of conversational analysis research.

The definition of repair, which Bloch (2005) proposes, underscores the need to manage problems in understanding in the communicative act. A rather expanded definition of repair comes from Schegloff (2000, 1997) who stresses out that the act of repairing entails coping with problems of troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding the talk in conversation or other forms of talk-in-interaction.

By ‘trouble’ he means (1987) occurrences as misarticulations, malapropisms, use of a wrong word, unavailability of the word when needed, failure to hear or to be heard, trouble on the part of the recipient in understanding, and incorrect understanding by the recipient. He notes that because anything in the talk can be a potential source of trouble, everything in conversations, in principle, is ‘repairable’.

A detailed look at the mechanism of repair reveals its three components, which, as Rieger identifies (2003), include the repaired segment containing the repairable, the repair initiation, and the repairing segment. From this point onwards, the concepts of ‘repairable’ and ‘trouble source’ (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977) can be understood to refer to communication errors or problems.

Rieger (2003) holds that the first component of repair is not necessarily audible to the addressee, although it can be inferred from the presence of the repair initiation and repairing segment. Cut offs and fillers are examples of repair initiation, while repairing segment pertains to the trouble the speaker perceives. Hirst et al (1994) point out that one common type of repair involves correcting another speaker’s interpretation of the discourse. Another type of repair, they add, involves producing a new reply to a turn that one has apparently misunderstood.

Clark (1994) offers a rather interesting view of the concept of repair. He likens the act of repair to antibiotics in remedying problems that have already appeared. Below is his representation of the repair process in a conversational act.

![Figure 2 Repair Pattern](image)

2.5.2 Either I repair or the other does

It seems natural in any interaction, Bazanella and Damiano (1999) cite, that the participant who realizes that misunderstanding occurs, regardless of his role in the conversation (whether as
speaker or as interlocutor), will eventually indicate the problem in order to collaborate with the other party in ‘reestablishing the lost coherence’. Schegloff et al (1977) categorize repair according to the conversational party responsible for its initiation – self-initiated repair (performed by the speaker of the trouble source) and other-initiated (that one made by any party other than the speaker of the trouble source).

Although the distinction between the two types of repair is clear, Schegloff et al (1977) assert that both are aimed at the same trouble types. Substantially important in understanding the demarcation between self-initiated and other-initiated is the fact that the former is, in many cases, preferred over the latter. Rieger (2003), Drew (1997), Clark (1994), and Norrick (1991) further validate this claim.

According to Norrick, the preference for self-correction can be attributed to the speaker’s attempt to initiate correction before the hearer is able to detect the disturbance. He furthers that the frequency for a hearer’s failure to recognize any problem that deserves correction is high, thereby allowing the speaker to grab such an opportunity to execute the necessary corrective action to address a perceived flaw - or in ‘anticipation of difficulties’.

The initiation of a self-repair, Levelt (1983) writes, requires the speaker to notice some troubles in his utterances, so that he can also interrupt the flow of his speech. This also necessitates the same speaker to produce a new utterance that would take care of the trouble and its consequences for the listener.

Egbert (2004), Drew (1997), and Norrick (1991) join Schegloff et al. (1977) in maintaining that the listener who recognizes that a problem occurs in the conversation will opt to withhold a repair initiation in favor of the opportunity for the source of the disturbance to rectify the unwanted error. Norrick believes that other-initiated repair poses a potential face threat, especially when the problem is present in the interaction between approximate equals, because it entails a judgment by one conversational party of the gap in the other’s speaking ability or world knowledge.

The latest assertion in this string of discussion obtains considerable support from the cultural notion of face (Brown & Levinson, 1983). The authors claim that ‘face’, defined as the public self-image that every member wants to have for himself, has two aspects: the negative face and the positive face. The first, they continue, refers to the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions can be unimpeded by others; while the second includes the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.

In conversational situations, Brown and Levinson point out, agreement is preferred because disagreement is a face-threatening act (FTA) – a concept used for an act that could jeopardize ‘face’. Such a reality, they add, justifies the preference for self-repair over repair by others because the latter may imply that the ‘self is misguided or incompetent’.

Going back to Norrick’s supposition, it is, however, mentioned that the degree of face threat may diminish if the source of the problem in the conversation views the repair as ‘friendly help’ or vital for the continuation of the talk.

The preference for immediate self-corrections, Clark (1994) hypothesizes, is founded on two justifications. He argues that self-correction, firstly, does not involve a lot of costs – as the said repair only requires only an extra word or phrase instead of two extra turns. Another reason cited for the choice for self-correction is substantiated by a conjecture that although it repairs one problem, it also prevents deeper and more costly misunderstandings along the way. In such an instance, he adds, repairs take the role of preventatives too.

In the case of other-initiated repair, its occurrence, according to Schegloff (2000) is positioned in the next turn after the trouble-source turn – and it involves the recipient of the problematic initiating the repair. Egbert (1997) states that a repair from a hearer is initiated to identify the trouble source and to select the trouble-source speaker as the proper respondent to the repair initiation.
Misunderstanding and uncertainty propel other-initiated repair, Norrick (1991) stresses out, although he also admits that accomplishing the necessary correction is still subject to the speaker of the trouble source. The latter argument sounds convincing, as Schegloff (2000) also mentions that the other party (hearer) in the conversation who initiates the repair also leaves the need to handle the conversational problem to its source (speaker).

2.5.3 The forms repair takes

The desirability of repair in establishing understanding in any communicative act is indubitable, and indeed, repair mechanisms have to be deployed to contain errors that could be impediments to effective and successful communication. Central to this discussion is an elaboration of a number of possibilities in executing repair to misunderstanding and non-understanding.

Repairing conversational errors can be achieved by repetition (Gonzales-Lloret, 2005; Rieger, 2003; Egbert 2004; Bazanella & Damiano, 1999; Bredart, 1991), by a specifying the correct alternative if an ambiguity is recognized (Bazanella & Damiano, 1999; Bredart, 1990), by replacing the vague word or term with clearer one (Rieger, 2003), and by explicitly contrasting the interlocutor’s interpretation, when it is easily reconstructed, with its intended meaning (Bazanella & Damiano, 1999).

Bredart (1991) adds that repair is also executed when the speaker replaces his current message with a new one, while Gonzales-Lloret (2005) mentions clarification requests as another repair technique.

In a study which Bredart conducted, it is revealed that the frequency in the usage of repetition as a repair strategy is higher than the other modes of repair. In the case of bilingual communication, which is of interest for this research, Rieger (2003) claims that repetitions are organized as self-repair in accordance to the structure of the language the interacting parties are using.

Using the definition of Reiger, repetitions, also called recycling, consist of the consecutive usage of the same quasi-lexical or lexical items. However, Rieger also underscores that not every repetition can be considered to fall under the class of self-initiated repairs. She adds that the speaker may resort to repetition to intensify the meaning of a lexical item, to hold the floor when he is interrupted, or, in some cases, it can be employed when he suspects the he could not be heard the first time because of disturbing noise.

2.5.4 Repair in intercultural encounters

In the previous discussion, the focus was on repair mechanisms employed by people who interact using a language in which they have the same proficiency. It is also of relevance for this study to look into how repair is carried out in intercultural interactions – so we say, encounters between nonnative speakers of English, or between a nonnative and native speaker.

References that have been retrieved to include in this discussion dwell on the repair mechanisms inherent in the conversation between native and nonnative speakers. Schegloff (1987) argues that the phenomena of repair are universal, as repair doesn’t vary substantially by society, language, or culture. A counter-argument from Norrick (1991), however, forwards that correction can vary by culture and context.

In a study by Gonzales-Lloret (2005), it is revealed that in NS/NNS communication there is no substantial difference on the initiator of a repair, as both parties are able to execute a repair act whenever necessary.

In another study by Kurhila (2001), it is known that in the interaction between native speaker and a nonnative speaker, there are plenty of situations for the former to straighten out the grammatical deficiencies of the latter; however, her findings indicate that a lot of grammatical errors committed by a nonnative speaker are left uncorrected.
According to Cameron and Williams (1997), since the NNS difficulty appears to be primarily in production, rather than comprehension, most of the repair work is necessitated by the NS’ failure to understand the NNS speech and not vice versa. They add that the primary triggers for NS’ non-comprehension sequences include mispronunciations, syntax errors (word order and ambiguity in reference), and lack of morphological markers.

The brief discussion on repair in the interaction between a native and a nonnative speaker precipitates another inquiry that is of interest for this study: in the conversation between two nonnative speakers, who usually initiates a repair?

2.5.5 Prevent instead of repair

Undeniably, the number of studies conducted to understand the phenomenon of repair is significantly high. Indeed repair has attracted so much attention in the academia that it appears to have been christened as the only possible solution in containing misunderstandings and non-understanding. Just as it is widely accepted that errors are inherent in any conversational activity, dealing with these errors must also be a ready strategy for interacting individuals to achieve understanding in the talk.

Skantze (2005) talks about error handling as a process of preventing, detecting, and recovering from errors. Such a definition precipitates the hypothesis that the prevention of errors is much preferable than their repair. Skantze also claims that an action can be taken even before the error has occurred – an example of such is called error prevention, which consists of actions that can be taken to prevent errors from coming up.

Clark (1994) points out that in certain situations speakers go beyond repairing errors in conversations – they have strategies for preventing certain problems from arising at all.

This discussion of error prevention draws substantial arguments from Clark’s work on managing problems in speaking. He likens conversation problems to infections which people prefer to handle before they grow into something worse. Such an analogy prompted the classification of managing conversational problems in consonance with a physician’s strategies in dealing with infections: preventatives, warnings, and repairs.

We focus on preventatives, as the concept of repair has been detailed out in the preceding discussion. Clark cites that preventatives are like inoculations in averting anticipated but avoidable problems. He adds that with preventatives, the problem is never realized. From this point, we are directed to a conjecture that preventatives are deployed to inhibit the occurrence of misunderstanding and non-understanding, compared to repairs that are positioned after the recognition of errors.

It is important to note that the terms ‘prevention’ and ‘preventative’ can be taken to refer to the same idea of avoiding problems in understanding and misunderstanding – the first, however, describes an act; while the second refers to what is used during the act. Preventatives, according to Clark (1994), can be hedges such as ‘kind of’, ‘sort of’, and ‘like’. These lexical elements, however, are most common in prevention techniques that take the form of self-corrections – as it has been mentioned in the previous discussion that self-correction can resemble prevention (Clark, 1994).

To establish the difference between the concepts of prevention and repair, a modified version of Clark’s schematic representation of prevention and repair patterns is shown in the next page.
When a problem in understanding is anticipated, the participant can immediately resort to any strategy of prevention mechanism to avoid the problem, thereby resulting to the continuation of the conversation – as indicated by a dotted line to also signify that after the prevention and the inhibition of the problem is the irrelevance of repair.

However, when the problem is not prevented from occurring and it is recognized by a participant, regardless of his role in the conversation, repair-initiation would be a consequence often resulting to the deployment of the necessary correction for the immediate restoration of the conversation after a momentary lapse due to misunderstanding or non-understanding.

Although in a study by Hansen, Novick, and Sutton (1997) on the prevention and repair of breakdowns in simple task domain, three breakdown prevention strategies are mentioned, only the first two would be included here for discussion as they directly relate to ordinary, naturally occurring conversations: turn management and overlapping speech, and directing conversational action.

The first approach, they stress out, that although avoiding overlapping speech is often a good way of avoiding problems leading to breakdowns requiring repair, simultaneous speech does not necessitate repair if it is closely coordinated and synchronized. In the second approach, one conversant explicitly directs the other on how to respond to an utterance.

2.5.6 The concept of ‘prevention’ in this research

Misunderstanding and non-understanding in helpdesk encounters are too costly to be deemed as natural occurrences, thus they are better prevented than repaired. The use of the concept of prevention in this research deviates from the original notion of Clark (1994), as he emphasizes that it is the speaker of the problematic utterance who takes the option to employ a preventative approach to avert possible problems in speaking. This argument is rooted on Clark’s assertion that self-correction prevents deeper and more costly misunderstandings down the line – thereby resulting to the duality of its function – both as a repair and a preventative.

In this research, however, prevention is hypothesized to be something that the other party in the conversation (primarily the recipient of the utterance) performs in an effort to attain a complete understanding of his partner’s utterance. With the avowed objective of gaining full understanding, the employment of prevention in a conversation, thereby, specifically leads to the avoidance of possible problems of misunderstanding and non-understanding within or during the conversational act. The diagram below shows the points advanced previously.

Figure 3 Prevention and Repair Patterns

Although in a study by Hansen, Novick, and Sutton (1997) on the prevention and repair of breakdowns in simple task domain, three breakdown prevention strategies are mentioned, only the first two would be included here for discussion as they directly relate to ordinary, naturally occurring conversations: turn management and overlapping speech, and directing conversational action.
A proposition is that the participant who anticipates for the occurrence of misunderstanding or non-understanding after receiving a message from the other party will try to thwart the problem by inviting the conversational partner to cooperate with him in this endeavor. Clark (1994) stresses out that participants in a conversation have a toolbox full of joint strategies for dealing with misunderstandings and non-understandings that inevitably occur. This assertion gets further reinforcement from Clark and Schaefer (1989) who argue that one of the participant’s goal is to reach the grounding criterion, and to that, they must not only repair any troubles they encounter, but take positive steps to establish understanding and avoid trouble in the first place.

From the argument above sprouts the next hypothesis that in order for a participant to reach the ideal of understanding, he has to construct a frame for grounding where he can be assured that his interpretation of the speaker’s utterance matches with the speaker’s intention for that same utterance. This would suggest that the act of preventing misunderstandings or non-understandings is the first step to the concept of ‘grounding’ by Clark and Brennan (1999) – where grounding eventually results to understanding.

Below is the researcher’s schematic representation of that proposition.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5** From the prevention of misunderstanding and non-understanding to the achievement of complete understanding

It must be noted that the fundamental nature of prevention is its use even before the inception of a specific understanding problem during the course of the conversation. The undesirability of misunderstanding and non-understanding in helpdesk encounters can be attributed to the fact that the discussion concerns highly equivocal tasks – and that the ideal is the achievement of correct and complete understanding for the immediate and effective formulation of the necessary solution to the technical problem of the caller.

In institutional encounters (which include helpdesk consultations), as Kurhila (2001) points out, there is a need for a higher level of accuracy – which could be possible only when the two parties share the same mind frame about what is being discussed (implying that they share a common ground) eventually leading to understanding.

Since the claim is that prevention can be an act which even the recipient of the utterance or message can perform, it is just necessary to set the boundary between prevention and repair – as opposed to Clark’s original conception of prevention as an alter ego of self-repair or self-correction.

In the context of helpdesk encounters, prevention is expected to be performed by the caller after the receipt of information from the agent. The postulation is that the caller would like to be assured that he receives the message from the agent correctly (supposing that the piece of information is highly relevant) – and that he would also like to be guaranteed the information received is complete.

The participant’s desire for completeness when receiving a message during the conversational act accords with what Wiegand (1999) already claims earlier that not everything is expressed in communication for reasons of ‘economy in language’ and because interacting individuals are not always aware of every piece of information necessary for clear understanding. This time it can be asserted that the demand for complete information is high in interactions involving the transmission of information necessary to address the problem or concern that precipitates one party to contact another party for help.

Proceeding from the latest argument is the next postulation that the recipient can only position a ‘preventative utterance’ after receiving a statement from the speaker – and the
preventative utterance would be based on the latest statement of the speaker. The hypothetical sequence just described is illustrated in the diagram that follows - an expanded version of the previously proposed schema sketching the use of prevention strategies (to avoid misunderstanding) until complete understanding is reached.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 6** From prevention of misunderstanding and non-understanding to complete understanding (expanded)

As pointed out earlier, the speaker’s utterance, which the recipient may categorize as a crucial segment in the overall talk, could be accounted for the recipient’s employment of a prevention technique (the production of a preventative utterance) to avoid the chances of him succumbing to understanding problems as the conversation progresses. The preventative utterance is expected to elicit a response from the target participant – depending on the nature and intention of the preventative utterance.

For instance, in the context of helpdesk encounters, if the caller repeats elements of the agent’s prior utterance as a request for verification of the caller’s constructed understanding of the message received, the agent may respond to the request by transmitting an approval of the caller’s constructed understanding – therefore resulting to the creation of a common ground that the agent will eventually share with the caller – further leading to complete understanding on the part of the caller.

*For this research, therefore, the next interest is to look into the ways callers perform preventions or preventive actions to avoid possibilities of misunderstanding.*

**Summary**

Repair, as defined in various sources, is intended to address and handle conversational problems such as misunderstanding and non-understanding. Although repairs can be other-initiated or self-initiated, researchers argue that the latter is more preferable than the former. The execution of a repair also takes different forms like repetition or word replacement.

This subchapter also dwells on repair in intercultural encounters, specifically between a native speaker and a nonnative speaker, and it is disclosed that when an NS tries to repair a problematic utterance from an NNS, the repair target is not the NNS deficiency in using the language of the NS. Although repair is a popular strategy in managing communication problems, a number of researchers have also argued that prevention is also an alternative to repair when dealing with conversational problems.

This section, then, details out the concept of ‘prevention’, as it deviates from the original conception of the said mechanism as a form of self-repair according to Clark (1994). In this research, the premise is that the recipient of an utterance deemed necessary for the attainment of whatever conversational goals there are is expected to construct and transmit a ‘preventative utterance’ to ensure that misunderstanding is avoided and complete understanding is achieved.
2.6  The research questions based on the discussed theories and related studies

The discussion of relevant theories and related studies for this research leads to the formulation of the research’s fundamental questions which provide a framework in the selection of segment for analysis. The research problems or questions include the following:

A. What are the factors behind the occurrence of misunderstandings in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative English speaking clients and agents?
B. How are these misunderstandings repaired and who initiates the repair?
C. What causes non-understanding in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative speakers of English?
D. Who usually recognizes the inception of non-understandings in helpdesk conversations and how are they repaired?
E. How do participants in helpdesk encounters prevent problems of misunderstandings?
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The discussions in this chapter center on the primary data for this research, the circumstances surrounding the collection of the data, and use of conversational analysis as an approach in making sense of the data for the research. The conduct of this research subscribes to the model of CA research practice proposed by Ten Have (1999).

3.1 Research Data

Since the study intends to explore the cases of misunderstandings and miscommunications in telephone conversations involving nonnative speakers of English, recordings of calls in a natural setting were collected. Of special interest for this particular study are calls made by individuals who are seeking for technical help from a commercial call center or from a helpdesk of an organization. It is important to note that the calls were carried out using English as a common medium for the transaction.

The necessity to concentrate on English calls also reflects the researcher’s deficiency in understanding Dutch conversations – knowing that a significant number of call centers and helpdesks in the Netherlands interact with their clients in Dutch, while only a handful of helpdesks carry out their operations in English.

3.2 Circumstances Surrounding the Collection of Data

Initially, the researcher contacted a number of commercial helpdesks to have their permission for him to have access to recordings made in their call centers. However, the existing Dutch law protecting privacy of telephone communication posed a difficulty in obtaining the needed cooperation of those organizations. Although one call center was willing to cooperate, the problem was the unavailability of English calls since it only handles Dutch calls.

Eventually, one commercial helpdesk in Enschede, The Netherlands – SENTO - agreed to contribute 11 recorded calls, under the condition that confidential information pertaining to individuals, organizations or institutions, and commercial products would not be mentioned in the study. Another educational institute in the city, the International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation or ITC, also expressed its willingness to cooperate by allowing the researcher to make recordings of calls himself.

Substantial amount of time that should have been allotted for recording calls from the commercial call center had been significantly spared as the said organization just handed a disk with a number of calls to the researcher. In the case of ITC Hepldesk, however, the recording of phone calls is not a practice, thus the researcher scheduled four weeks for recording the needed English telephone conversations. The higher percentage of international students in the said institute, where English serves as a common language, primarily prompted the idea for the researcher to also collect the recordings there.

Telephone calls from SENTO are presumed to have been recorded during the winter of 2005, while the recording of calls in ITC spanned for a month – from the second week of May to the second week of June 2006.

3.3 The Application of Conversational Analysis in this Study

The research primarily employs the techniques of conversational analysis in making sense of the recordings that have been gathered. The application of conversational analysis for this study subscribes to the model of CA research practice introduced by Ten Have (2004).
3.3.1 Production of the materials to be analyzed

Telephone conversations to be analyzed for this research were recorded using Soft Call Recorder V3, which enables the researcher to record calls into a personal computer, making it possible to save the recorded calls as WAV files. More information about the said equipment can be accessed in this site: www.vidicode.nl.

3.3.2 Preparation of the transcriptions of the recordings

Familiarity with the nature and the flow of the different recorded phone conversations is a requisite for the phase involving the transcriptions of calls. Before transcriptions were made, the researcher had to listen to the recordings twice or thrice to also sort out calls that contain conversational patterns that are highly relevant in providing answers to the specified research questions. This resulted to the inclusion of approximately 60 percent of the collected phone calls that contained cases of misunderstandings and miscommunications for analysis.

During the transcription stage, elements in the dialogue that Ten Have (1999) identifies are taken into account: words as spoken, sounds as uttered, inaudible/incomprehensible sounds or words, spaces and silences or pauses, overlapped speech, and pace or stretches. Stresses on words or on parts of the words were also considered. Transcriptions were prepared using the notations introduced by Psathas (1995), Drummond & Hopper (1991), and Atkinson & Heritage (1984).

Ease in the transcription of the calls was possible using WavePad v 2.00, which also helped the researcher in determining the time consumed for pauses and stops during the dialogues. Pauses were measured by tenth of seconds, which would be difficult to precisely record using conventional stop watches. The time for pauses is obtained by first highlighting the flat area that shows the stop or pause – then the arithmetic function of subtraction is performed to derive the time for the lapse from the values of ‘region start’ and ‘region end’.

![Figure 7](image.png)

**Figure 7** Segment of the screen in determining time for pauses (the shaded area is the time for the pause)

The figure on the next page shows a screenshot of the aforementioned software, which also presents an indication of the flow of the conversation – where pauses are represented by flat lines, while ongoing talks are presented with vertical lines of varying lengths to also signify variations in intonations, stresses, and speech volumes.
After transcribing the necessary amount of calls for analysis, the transcriptions were then checked against their audio counterparts for accuracy – with emphasis on the correct usage of symbols for the utterances and the exactness of sounds, words, and phrases as uttered.

3.3.3 Selection of episodes to be analyzed on the grounds of a variety of considerations

Questions were first formulated to guide the researcher in the selection of the phenomena to be studied. The original intention was to focus on the occurrence of misunderstanding and the ways they are repaired during helpdesk encounters involving nonnative English speakers.

However, after listening to the recordings for a number of times, the researcher discovered a significant percentage of non-understanding incidences in the different recordings. Another strategy for dealing with misunderstanding or non-understanding – prevention – was also included for analysis.

3.3.4 The act of ‘making sense’ of the episodes

For this research, this stage involves categorizing the episodes or selected segments in accordance with the formulated questions of the research. Segments with misunderstandings were segregated from non-understanding segments, then they were analyzed for categorization – since in this research, the causes of misunderstanding and non-understanding, mechanisms of repair, and the modes of prevention have also been identified.

3.3.5 Explication of the interpretation

The interpretation and the analysis of the segments were elaborated using existing theories and findings related to the phenomena of interest. Segments that share almost the same features were grouped for a detailed discussion. In this case, for instance, when discussing a particular type of repair, one segment would not suffice to establish the credibility of the assertions, thus a segment for a specific topic, for example, has to be
supported by other analyzed segments that were strongly related to the one segment that has been initially selected.

In relation to this phase, Ten Have (2004) cites that comparison with similar or dissimilar cases, either implicitly or explicitly, is an important resource for what is called ‘single case analyses’, which focuses on the explication of one particular episode.
4 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents the organization and the analysis of the data for this research. Data are in the form of talk segments that are derived from entire telephone conversations recorded in a commercial call center (SENTO) and a helpdesk of an educational institute (ITC) – both located in Enschede, the Netherlands. The presentation of the data is in accordance with the sequence of the problem statements of the research, which have been stated in the previous chapters.

Segments that contain cases of misunderstanding and non-understanding are of primary interest for this study, thus they are the relevant data in this presentation. Since another significant area of interest for this research are the approaches (such as repair and prevention) people use in dealing with cases of misunderstanding and non-understanding in helpdesk encounters, segments with the aforementioned instances are also included for analysis.

The first section of this chapter is allotted for a discussion of the causes of misunderstanding that are revealed from the collected data and the repair mechanisms that are carried out to deal with misunderstandings. The next section presents the strategies participants in a helpdesk encounter employ to solve non-understanding problems, although the research also looks into the possible causes of non-understandings; while the last section dwells on the act of prevention, which is another option, aside from repair, for a participant in the conversation to use to restrain understanding problems from occurring.

Complete transcriptions of the recorded phone calls used for analysis can be found in the appendix section, which also includes the list of transcription notations (with explanation) used in the presentation of the segments for analysis.

4.1 What are the factors behind the occurrence of misunderstandings in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative English speaking clients and agents? How are these misunderstandings repaired and who initiates the repair?

In the initial stage of this research, the premise is that when two people with different linguistic backgrounds commence a conversational act using a common language, in which their usage and knowledge level of that said language is not equal, communication problems, such as misunderstandings and non-understandings are likely to occur. Such a belief obtains substantial theoretical support from the works of Gass & Varonis (1991), Bazanella & Damiano (1999), Weigand (1999), and Kurhila (2001).

Kurhila (2001) stresses out that the inequality in the interacting participant’s access to the language in use leads to a host of communication problems that are almost absent in the interaction between native speakers. This suggests that the misunderstanding that occurs in the interaction between participants who use a secondary language can be attributed to phonetic (mispronunciations), syntactic (defective sentence construction), grammar, and lexical (problems with word usage) differences.

The collected data, however, reveal that a number of misunderstandings that result from the interaction of two individuals who are non-native speakers of the language in use during a helpdesk encounter are due to some factors that go beyond phonetics, syntax, and grammar.

4.1.1 False belief as a cause of misunderstanding

Although both the speaker and the listener can be responsible for the occurrence of misunderstanding during the encounter (Bazanella & Damiano, 1999), one particular ‘trigger’ of misunderstanding which the cited authors have identified is one that is related to the interlocutor or the listener – false belief. This is exemplified by the segment presented below.
Example of a false belief resulting to misunderstanding (with other-initiated repair)
Excerpt 1 from Telephone Conversation 4

4  C2  I have a question (0.3)
5  C1  "Yeah"
6  →  C2  [Um: (0.5) Harriett, uh, Zulu (0.5) has a, a smart card but only three, uh, numbers, are
7  →  tho, on there (0.5)
8  →  and I need more numbers for the (0.5) student number (0.8)
9  →  C1  But it should be there (0.3) it’s, eh, under his, her name (.) is that right? (0.7)
10 →  C2  hhhhh (0.4) Yeah, it’s, i, i, on the card?
11 →  C1  O yeah, ok, moment, yeah ok, I know why, because they, they dint inform us (0.4)
12  C2  [A-ha
13  C1  [Everything was in rush, ok, now I know, yeah, just, I, I, I, will let you know (.) yeah†
11  C1  O yeah, ok, moment, yeah ok, I know why, because they, they dint inform us (0.4)
12  C2  [A-ha
13  C1  [Everything was in rush, ok, now I know, yeah, just, I, I, I, will let you know, yeah?

The conversation is between two colleagues of an international institute – C1, a Chinese, is a secretary in one of the offices of the aforementioned institute; while C2, a Dutch, is helpdesk agent who is asking for clarification regarding the problem of an African student with his student card.

In line 4, C2 immediately states her reason for calling (I have a question), which C1 responds to with a ‘yeah’ in the next line – indicating her willingness to listen to the caller’s concern which precipitates the call in the first place. In line 6, the agent proceeds to detail the matter for discussion – that the smart card of the student has only three numbers and more numbers are instead needed for the student number.

A case of misunderstanding commences at line 9 when C1 insists that the number should be there – under the name of the student. However, an instance of self-doubt occurs when she requests for a confirmation of what she has mentioned in the initial phase of her turn. This is apparent towards the end of line 9 (is that right?).

The occurrence of misunderstanding in this instance is triggered by C1’s false belief. C1’s mention of ‘there’ in line 9 is referring to something where the numbers are to be found – and that something is not mentioned in the conversation. ‘There’ therefore marks the display of a mismatch between C1’s thinking and that of C2’s – thus in line 10 (it’s, i, i, on the card?) C2 asks for a clarification whether C1 is referring to the ‘card’ when she says ‘there’.

After a pause of 0.7 second, C2 deploys a response of ‘yeah’, in line 10, to C1’s utterance in line 9 - which doesn’t necessarily confirm the assertion of C1 in the first part of line 9 (but it should be there). C2 frames the ‘yeah’ reply not to approve of C1’s claim that the numbers are already on the smart card, which C1 could have been thinking is with C2 during the talk, although nothing in this segment can prove that C2 really has the student card.

That same ‘yeah’ signifies C2’s confirmation of the fact the number should be under the student’s name, but during the talk the numbers in question might have not been present on the card because C2 positions an inquiry in line 10 (it’s, i, i, on the card?) to imply her negation to the assertion of C1. The said question in that same line serves as a form of an invitation for C1 to check on her prior claim.

What happens in lines 9 and 10 exemplifies what Bazanella and Damiano (1999) describe as a situation when C1’s wrong interpretation, and in this case false belief, is detected immediately afterwards by C2. The said detection allows C2 to structure the necessary utterance for clarification in line 10.

What is contained in line 11, then, is an example of what Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) call self-repair that can issue from other initiation. Line 11 shows that C1 does not hesitate to admit that she is mistaken with her earlier claim – which, in this case, can be her way of...
correcting her misunderstanding only after C2 positions an invitation to repair C1’s erroneous assumption.

4.1.2 Erroneous inference as a cause of misunderstanding

The analyzed segments in this subchapter show that misunderstanding can also be attributed to the participant’s erroneous inference from the utterance of his conversational partner.

Example of an erroneous inference resulting to misunderstanding (with other-initiated repair)
Excerpt 2 from Telephone Conversation 8

A client from Norway happens to contact a helpdesk located in the Netherlands, as he is having some problems with his ‘play station’. The Dutch agent receives the call by identifying himself and by signaling that the conversation should be in English, in line 1 (how I may help in English, please↑).

The caller responds with a relatively loud ‘hello’, in line 2, sounding a bit disoriented, although this could also imply that he is also testing the telephone environment. According to Schegloff (1968), the caller might say only ‘hello’ to invite the called person to recognize who is calling – which he describes as a common attempt to establish or confirm the intimacy or familiarity of a relationship. That said statement fails to establish its validity in this context of the telephone talk.

In a commercial helpdesk where the anonymity of the caller and agent is extremely high, however, recognition of the person over the phone just on the basis of voice happens to be impossible. In this case, the louder ‘hello’ was countered by another ‘hello’ from the agent in line 3. It is notable that both ‘hellos’ from the caller and the agent sound as if asking ‘who am I talking to?’.

Another possible way of looking at the exchange of ‘hellos’ in lines 2 and 3 is to consider the nature of turn-taking and turn-giving in conversations. In line 2, the caller’s relatively loud ‘hello’ with its rising intonation is presumably a manifestation of surprise at the fact that the agent opens the call in English, as he may be expecting that the agent would answer in Norwegian. The caller’s question in line 4 (Ya, e, e::: do you speak Norwegian?) extends credence to this argument.

The agent’s ‘hello’, again with a rising intonation, in line 3, appears to assume the function of a filler, as an appropriate and a more complete utterance is yet to be constructed. This can be considered as the agent’s approach of taking his turn, which eventually becomes a turn-giving signal allowing the caller to proceed to his utterance, which could be necessary in officially commencing the talk.

In line 4, the caller eventually breaks the short exchange of inquisitive hellos by articulating his preference for a particular language during the interaction (Ya, e, e::: do you speak
Norwegian?). The agent responds in line 5 that he does not speak Norwegian, which the caller eventually dismisses in line 6 as a non-problem (No, it’s no, it’s no problem).

Viewed from the concept of ‘face’ (Brown and Levinson, 1983), the caller’s utterance in line 6 is a conveyance of his willingness to cooperate with the agent in the commencement of the interaction despite the agent’s inability to speak Norwegian – as the caller, with his ‘no, it’s no, it’s no problem’, could be suggesting that the conversation can proceed with the language used by the agent when he receives the call.

In the latter part of line 6, the caller again asks if the agent is located in Norway, and this second query could have been deployed to express the caller’s need to talk to somebody within Norway, as he is in Norway and perhaps he thinks his concern could be well addressed by somebody in that same country – as he may have the necessary knowledge about products and shops based in the country. The agent, then, replies in line 7 by citing that he is located in the Netherlands.

The agent takes his turn in line 8 to explain the reason for asking for the agent’s location (Ok because, a, a I got Norwen and um, uh). Although he is not able to complete the said utterance, it presumably suggests that the caller has a product which he has purchased in one of the shops in Norway, as hinted by the phrase ‘I got Norwen’. In this case, ‘Norwen’ could have been a cut-off of the adjective Norwegian, again presumably referring to a product that he wants to discuss during the talk with the agent.

The position of ‘yes’ from the agent in, line 9, even if the caller has not yet finished his utterance, could have been his way of saying that he has already understood the callers’ information, but there is nothing he can do because he doesn’t speak Norwegian and he is not located in Norway.

Eventually he is prompted to construct an explanation in line 10 (I understand(s) but I think the Norwegian agents aren’t available at this moment). In turn, the caller transmits a receipt of acknowledgement of the information from the agent in line 11 (ok). We focus now on line 10 as a problematic utterance from the agent, since his statement appears to have been formed by his assumption that the caller prefers to converse with a Norwegian agent only.

The information that Norwegian agents are not around to handle his concern, still in line 10, seems not to deter the caller from proceeding as he eventually asks the agent if he can obtain some help from him, in line 12 (Oh ok, ok but maybe you can help me or), which the agent also responds to positively with ‘that’s right’ in line 13.

What is evident from the segment is that the agent’s erroneous inference from the utterances of the caller causes him to misunderstand the intention of the caller during that specific encounter. However, the caller’s dialogue in line 6, already implies his readiness to engage in a conversation with the non-Norwegian agent – as he emphasizes that it’s not a problem if the agent doesn’t speak Norwegian because they can also converse in English. Further, the caller has also emphasized, in line 12, that it may be possible for the agent to help him even if he is not located in Norway.

The caller’s statement in line 12 takes a subtle form of telling the agent that at that point in the conversation it doesn’t matter if there are no Norwegian agents who could talk to him. Although in that same turn, he could have corrected the agent’s assumption that the caller would also like to talk to a Norwegian agent based in the Netherlands; but instead of doing it, the caller just inquires if the agent can help him – presumably his attempt to avoid disagreement with the agent after the caller recognizes a mismatch between the agent’s interpretation of the caller’s utterance (in line 8) and the caller’s intention for that same utterance.

When the caller opts not to deploy a correction of the agent’s interpretation of the caller’s utterance it concretizes what McRoy and Hirst (1995) claim that even when a participant notices a discrepancy between his own interpretation and the one displayed by the other participant, he can choose to initiate a repair or let it pass. In this case, the caller just allows the ‘flawed interpretation’ to pass.
The agent’s ‘that’s right’ in line 13, implies a treatment of his erroneous inference – presumably connoting that he is mistaken in his earlier belief that the caller would only want to talk to a Norwegian agent, but now he comes to realize that all the while the caller has been suggesting that he needs some help even from a non-Norwegian agent.

The next segment also contains a case of misunderstanding that is attributed to the erroneous inference of one of the participants in the conversation. For this example, however, the nationality of the caller is not identified (which makes it difficult to tell whether he is a nonnative English speaker or not), although the agent is still Dutch (a nonnative speaker of the language for this interaction). The use of English in this particular conversation, nevertheless, contributes to the intercultural character of the interaction.

**Example of an erroneous inference resulting to misunderstanding (with other-initiated repair)**
**Excerpt 3 from Telephone Conversation 10**

49 → C Um-n'ya the last one I (.) press it (1.1) nothing is “hap-pening” (0.6)  
50 → A In (.) sys-tem↑ (0.7)  
51 → C Ya (0.2) “in sys-tem” (0.2)  
52 → A If (.) you (.) press (.) this (.) ef (0.2) three but-tons: so-called so, so, lowest but-ton  
53 → C [ ya ]  
54 → C A’ k’ ment, for hard disk (.)  
55 → A Ya, ok that’s the one↓ so now you can select (.) that one (0.4)  
56 → A And for-mat the hard-drive (.) of (.) course (.)  
57 → C “Can try a send” do you want to format (.) yes?

In this phase of the conversation, the caller, after receiving the detailed instruction from the agent, is already pressing a button to handle his problem in formatting a hard drive. In the previous turns, the caller had the difficulty in locating the correct button to press, which is now remedied, as shown in line 49, when he admits he has already found and pressed it. Towards the end of line 49, he claims that after pressing the button nothing happens.

With that utterance, the agent is propelled to ask for clarification, in line 50, if the caller really means that nothing is happening in system. The request for clarification may have been instigated by the agent’s surprise that the system still doesn’t work even after the caller has claimed that he has already pressed the required button.

The caller’s utterance in line 51 (ya in sys-tem↑) is only expressing his attempt to validate his claim in line 49 (nothing is “hap-pening”), which the agent has completed in line 50 with an interrogative utterance ‘in system↑’, which is the agent’s way of saying ‘are you referring to the system or something else?’.  

Line 52 shows doubt on the part of the agent as he again inquires if the caller really has pressed the F3 button, which he emphasizes by describing that it is the lowest button. The caller’s ‘ya’ response in line 53 eventually changes to ‘a’ k’ ment, for hard disk’ in line 54. What is the implication of the shift in tone?  

The first, with ‘ya’, is his assertion that indeed he has pressed the button which the agent has asked him to - which could be continued by this hypothetical utterance of ‘ya, I did what you have told me, but nothing has happened’. The caller’s next utterance in line 53, however, with an almost inaudible expression of ‘a, k’ or presumably ‘ah, ok’, is an admission that instead of pressing the F3 button, he has pressed another button – and whatever the button is, the recorded conversation does not indicate.

With an invitation for repair from the agent, in line 52 (if you press this of three buttons...), the caller is then directed to a realization that he has not pressed the correct button, as indicated by his utterance in line 54. The lowest button which the agent describes is the button the caller says as the button for the ‘hard disk’.
Going back to the agent’s utterance in line 52 (if you press this ef three but-tons:: co so, so, so lowest but-ton), the request for clarification from the agent already takes the form of repair which, as Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) claim, is another example of a repair initiated by the person other than the source of the error.

The flow of the conversation is then restored in line 55 with the agent reiterating the button that the caller should press, while line 56 indicates that the caller has already pressed the correct button as he is lead to the next option of formatting, in line 57 (do you want to format yes?), which the agent has already anticipated once the right button is pressed.

Another segment that shows a case of misunderstanding attributable to the participants’ his failure to correctly infer from his partner’s utterance is this dialogue taken from a telephone conversation that is just different from the rest of the collected data, as it involves a British client (a native speaker) and a Dutch agent (a non-native speaker).

Example of an erroneous inference resulting to misunderstanding (with other-initiated repair)
Excerpt 4 from Telephone Conversation 9

| 40 | A | Ok () when you go () to (0.2) start () and then to (0.3) pro-grams::: um you should see Nero in there (1.2) |
| 41 | C | Go to start (1.7) and 2to () pro Nero () smart () start:: like start (0.2) smart
| 42 | C | (inaudible word)) () |
| 44 | A | And that () that's (0.3) the one to () start, please (1.3) |
| 45 | C | Shall I (0.4) click on that? (0.3) |
| 46 | A | Yes (0.2) please (2.4) |

In this transaction, a British client dials a call center in the Netherlands because of a problem he encounters in using a software for CD burning. In the initial phase of the conversation, the caller has already described the trouble, while the agent has also attempted to diagnose the difficulty by acquiring more information from the caller that could help him solve the problem.

In lines 40 and 41, the agent is already explaining to the caller the steps that he should take to access the software (Ok when you go to start and then to pro-grams::: um you should see Nero in there). The caller’s repetition, in line 42, of a number of phrases from the dialogue of the agent (go to start, to pro Nero) could be taken as his attempt to internalize the steps so that he can execute them without difficulty.

Although a segment of the caller’s statement in line 43 is not audible, the caller must have verbalized a word which initiates the production of an instructive statement from the agent in line 44 (and that, that’s the one to start, please).

A momentary pause of 1.3 seconds marks the inception of a difficulty on the part of the caller to execute what the agent has told him in the previous turn – and this claim is confirmed in line 45 (Shall I click on that? ) when the caller admits his failure to understand the agent’s utterance in the previous line.

The inclusion of please at the end of the agent’s statement indicates that in that instant he expects the caller to do what he has just said. Since giving instructions, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is an example of a negative face threatening act, the agent ensures that the agent’s ‘face’ would not be severed, thus he instructs the caller politely with the addition of ‘please’ in his statement.

The statement in line 44 would have a different implication and tone if please would have not been affixed before the termination of the agent’s statement. The utterance ‘and that, that’s the one to start’ would only suggest that the speaker is just producing a declarative statement, not one which can be classified as imperative. Such a declarative statement would also denote that the caller doesn’t have to perform the action of ‘clicking’ at that very moment, since he has the option to do it anytime after the phone conversation with the agent.
With the caller signaling in line 45 (shall I click on that?) (an invitation for the speaker to attend to something repairable) the difficulty in line 44 (And that, that’s the one to start, please), the agent immediately performs a repair by politely asserting the previous instruction – in line 46 with ‘yes, please’.

This particular segment lends credence to the assertion that misunderstanding due to a defective cognitive process, specifically false belief and erroneous inference, is not culturally and linguistically regulated – as it manifests itself in interactions between two nonnative speakers (with similar or different cultural affiliations) and in the conversations between a nonnative and a native speaker of a certain language.

4.1.3 Incomplete information as a cause of misunderstanding

The previous section shows that in helpdesk encounters involving people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, misunderstanding can be attributed to the interlocutor as the source of the problem. However, as already mentioned, the speaker, too, is accountable for the inception of misunderstanding during the interaction (Bazanella & Damiano, 1999). Although Bazanella and Damiano (1999) disclose that misunderstanding triggers related to the speaker are classified into local factors (slips of the tongue, ambiguous forms) and global factors (structure of the information or utterance both on the pragmatic and syntactic level), one segment from the corpus of data contains an example of the latter type of trigger (in this case, the structure of the information) that is related to the speaker.

Example of an incomplete information structure resulting to misunderstanding
(with other-initiated repair)
Excerpt 5 from Telephone Conversation 11

121 → A Then I leave it (0.2) ah (.) op-en↑ (0.2) as (.) “it” (.) is↑ (0.7) please (0.3) give
122 → (0.2) only moni-tor (0.3) in (.) foot (0.5) no (.) cable (0.5) whatever (.) cable (.) can be
123 → (.) taken:: off (0.3) please (0.2) take (.) it (.) off [from] the moni-tor↓
124 → [now] ↑ (0.5)
125 → C Now↑ (0.3)
126 A E’ you don’t need (.) to do now:: but (.) in a (.) couple (.) of (.) days (.) when they (.)
127 come (.) and (.) swap (.) the moni-tor (0.5) at (.) your (.) place↓ (0.5)
128 C E ya:: ok (0.3)

A Swedish client happens to contact a helpdesk based in the Netherlands to obtain whatever help he can get in solving the problem with his monitor. Although the exact nationality of the agent is not known, he mentions that he is only taking care of concerns from the English and the German markets (as indicated in line 173 of the complete transcribed recording for this segment, refer to the appendix section).

Prior to line 121, the agent requested the caller to give him the date of purchase of the monitor, which can be found in the invoice for the said equipment. The caller, however, claimed that he didn’t have the invoice with him, thus prompting the agent to inform him that he would not include the date of purchase in the set of information about the problematic monitor, in line 121 (then I leave it, uh, open as it is).

For background information, anyway, in the first part of this conversation, the agent had already been collecting the information that he needs to handle the problem of the caller with his monitor. Still in line 121 until line 123, the agent starts instructing the caller with what to do (please give only moni-tor in foot no cable whatever cable can be taken:: off please take it off from the moni-tor).

The caller must have interpreted the instruction as something urgent that needs to be executed right away, thereby spurring him to ask if he should do it ‘now’ in line 124. The
interrogative sounding ‘now’ is again uttered in the caller’s turn, line 125, which could be his way of nudging the agent to attend to his first question, in line 124, whether he should do right away what the agent asks him to do. The misunderstood agent then positions a response, in lines 125 and 126 (‘e’ you don’t need to do now:: but in a couple of days when they come and swap the moni-tor at your place), to the caller’s inquiry.

It is possible to infer from this particular instance that the caller’s notion of the time for him to act out on the spelled out instructions does not coincide with that of the agent’s. What is apparent is that the caller misunderstands the agent by thinking that he should do right at that moment the action of ‘taking off’ whatever cable can be ‘taken off from the monitor’. The deployment of ‘now’ as a point for clarification by the caller becomes a signal for repair, which the agent acknowledges in lines 126 and 127 (‘e’ you don’t need to do now:: but in a couple of days when they come and swap the moni-tor at your place).

The indication that the agent in line 123 has already completed his statement is indicated by a downward pointing arrow – and this must have caused the caller to ask for the time when to ‘take off’ the cables from the monitor. The misunderstanding, in this case, therefore, can be attributed to the absence of the information about the time, which the agent treats in lines 126 and 127 by specifying when the caller is expected to ‘take off’ the cables from the monitor.

**Initial Summary of Findings for Sub-chapter 4.1**

The first question was constructed under the premise that cases of misunderstandings in helpdesk interactions involving nonnative speakers of English would be attributed to the participants’ unequal competencies in the use of English as a secondary language. It was initially hypothesized that misunderstandings within this kind of encounter would be caused by mispronunciations, faulty use of lexical elements, and defective sentence construction. However, the data presented in this section reveal that, indeed, causes or triggers of misunderstanding in this situation go beyond phonic, lexical, and syntactic deficiencies.

From the analyzed recordings, misunderstandings that arise from the interaction between nonnative speakers are caused by knowledge deficiencies (specifically false beliefs) and defective cognitive processes (erroneous inferences from the speaker’s utterances) on the part of the interlocutor, and problematic information structure (incomplete information, for instance) on the part of the speaker.

Just like in the interactions between two native speakers, both the speaker and the interlocutor can be responsible for the occurrence of misunderstanding during the conversation. Misunderstandings that have been analyzed in this section are addressed with other-initiated repairs, which are immediately executed by the source of the troublesome or problematic utterance.

The finding that repair is always initiated by the participant other than the source of the misunderstood utterance affirms what Norrick (1991) claims that misunderstanding, along with uncertainty, is already expected to spur other-initiated repair.

**4.2 What causes non-understanding in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative speakers of English? Who usually recognizes the inception of non-understanding and how is it repaired?**

Although misunderstanding is initially the focus of the study, the available data also reveal more incidences of non-understanding during helpdesk encounters involving nonnative speakers of English. In this section, the primary interest is on the ways nonnative speakers handle cases of non-understanding during helpdesk consultations. The analyses of the segments, though, also
contain discussions of the causes that could have triggered the failure on the part of the listener to understand the speaker.

Non-understanding, or lack of understanding in the terminology of Allwood and Abela (1984), occurs when a receiver cannot connect incoming information with stored information. Lack of understanding, they cite, can be attributed to two factors – missing relevant information and missing strategies for relevant connection.

The data for this research show that an interlocutor who doesn’t understand the utterance of a speaker will not hesitate to indicate his failure to understand by initiating a repair for the speaker to execute so that problematic utterances are eventually corrected. Here we look at the strategies participants used to initiate a repair of the non-understood utterance and the mechanisms employed by the source of the non-understood utterance in solving the problem with non-understanding.

4.2.1 Repair of a non-understood utterance by repetition

The use of repetition by a speaker to get his message across effectively to the intended recipient has been validated in the studies of Bazanella & Damiano (1999), Rieger (2003), and Egbert (2004). In cases when the speaker assumes that the listener fails to understand an utterance, he resorts to repeating the non-understood statement for the listener to process. Consider the following segments that contain repetition as a form of correction of the non-understood utterance.

Example of repetition as a repair strategy for a non-understood utterance (with other-initiated repair)

Excerpt 6 from Telephone Conversation 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Utterance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Eeee (.) am trying (.) to:::(.) delete (0.7) eee (.) different (. file (. that I (. put (0.3))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>in the::: (.) ep ti pi fa ep ti pi site (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ya (.) but you cannot↑ (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Ok (0.3) then (0.6) I (0.4) I need to list the fax here? (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Uh::: let’s (.) say standard↑ within seven days (.) they will get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>removed automatically↑ (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>“Aha” (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Or↑ (0.5) if you::: as you do now (.) call me (.) I can remove it for you↑ (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>No that’s ok (0.3) [so ((this portion is inaudible))]] ip we, ip we (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>[if you WANT I can remove it]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>E we, e we (0.3) il wil (0.5) am sorry, it will removening in seven days? (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ya↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Ok↑ (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>But if you want I can just remove it now (0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Wa (.) this uhh, the folder that say Castayano?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ya, I see it (0.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this conversation, a Cuban student finds it difficult to delete files from his folder. He decides to call the helpdesk and is attended to by a Dutch agent.

Line 8 shows the caller starting to state the trouble he is confronted with and the later part of that turn (line 9) immediately reveals a slight difficulty on the part of the speaker to articulate the correct terminology. In that same turn, the speaker immediately initiates a repair by replacing the previous term that has not been completely uttered with a new one (ep ti pi fa ep ti pi site). Clark (2004) calls this ‘replacement’ – by displaying the replacing words adjacent to, or juxtaposed against, his display of the original word.

In this case, the replacement is the caller’s way of informing the caller that his first utterance (ep ti pi fa) is incorrect, thus he is replacing it with a corrected element (ep ti pi site). The non-lexical ‘fa’ is probably a cut-off of the word ‘file’, which is eventually changed to ‘site’ – a manifestation on the part of the speaker to set the difference between the two terms, as ‘file’, a
term mentioned in line 8, is a part of site – and not file being a part of file. This is the first case of self-repair in this particular segment.

The agent’s response to the turn takes the form of a question for a possible clarification (but you cannot↑) in line 10. A ‘yes-no’ answer would have been expected as response from the caller, but instead it is just an ‘OK’ furthered by another inquiry (then I, I need to list the fay there?) in line 11. The ‘ok’ is not deployed to validate the ‘understanding check’ from the agent, although presumably the caller does not understand that in line 10 the agent is requesting him to verify whether the agent’s understanding that the caller cannot delete the files from the folder is correct or not.

The agent does not use his turn to reiterate his former question, but instead he delivers his immediate response to the latest question from the caller, as shown in lines 12 and 13 (Uh::: let’s say standard↑ within seven days they will get removed automatically↑), which eventually leaves the request for confirmation of the agent’s understanding of the caller’s problem unattended.

What can be hypothesized from the exchange of turns between the caller and the agent, from lines 8 to 11, is that the caller is still engaged in what Baker, Emmison, and Firth (2001) term as a narrative accounting of the reason for the call. The agent, however, interrupts the said accounting in line 10 with his attempt to cooperate with the caller in the production of his next utterance (ya, but you cannot↑), which Clark and Schaefer (1989) refer to as completion – the initiation of a contribution to the discourse from the recipient by presenting an utterance for his partner’s consideration.

It is also possible to suppose that the agent’s utterance in line 10 is his approach of inviting the caller to validate his constructed understanding of the caller’s problem, as pointed out earlier in the discussion.

In line 15, the agent then suggests that he can delete the files for the speaker, which is countered by a ‘no, that’s ok’ reply in line 16 – here signifying that the caller does not agree to the agent’s proposed action and that he can take care of the action of deleting the contents himself. In the same line, it is indicated that the caller struggles to continue with another question (ip we, ip we), but the agent restates his suggestion (if you WANT I can remove it) in line 17 – which the caller does not respond to.

Note that the agent says the word ‘want’ louder, presumably, to inform the caller that he is firm in his proposal of helping the caller delete the files so that the problem is solved. This is more interesting because the second-time offer overlaps with the caller’s utterance in the middle part – presumably because the agent wants the caller to respond to his earlier proposal, probably because he thinks the caller has not heard what he has said in line 15, or perhaps he presumes the caller does not understand the agent’s proposal. Bazanella and Damiano (1999) argue that repetition, as a repair component, is carried out when the speaker thinks that the interlocutor has failed to catch his utterance.

The caller’s inability to attend to the agent’s repeated proposal of help can be traced back to what happens in line 14 – with the caller’s ‘aha’ utterance, which could have been transmitted as a form of an acknowledgement receipt for the information acquired from the agent in lines 12 and 13. The agent presumably interprets the caller’s ‘aha’ as continuer, thus he takes his turn to produce a new utterance in line 15 – the first statement of the offer (Or↑ if you::: as you do now call me I can remove it for you↑).

If we look at the last part of line 16, the caller launches to frame his understanding of the agent’s information which he completes in line 18 for the agent’s verification. It is noticeable too that during the construction of the utterance for verification, the caller commits speech errors which he immediately corrects during his turn. In line 18, he positions an apologetic statement (am sorry) to indicate his admission of speech trouble and a recognition of his deficiency in using the language during the conversational act.

45
Line 18 is indicative of the speaker’s intention of correctly processing the information received from the agent (in line 12) by requesting for an affirmation of his understanding of the statement from the agent. Going back to the discussion of the ambiguous ‘aha’, it is probable that the agent’s interpretation of the function of the caller’s aha does not coincide with the caller’s intended purpose for his ‘aha’. This is where misunderstanding surfaces.

From these arguments, it can be postulated that the agent repeated his proposal for help because he fails in getting the caller to correctly respond to the proposals. However, the caller is not able to attend to the agent’s proposals possibly because during that time the agent is insisting on deleting the files of the caller as a kind of help, the caller is also focused on understanding the agent’s information in lines 12 and 13.

What can be inferred from this scenario is that the agent neglects the necessity of giving enough time for the caller to think and understand what the agent has said. Line 19 contains the agent’s response (yes) to the caller’s request for verification, which the caller also acknowledges in line 20 with ‘ok’.

This analyzed segment shows that the agent’s restatement of the offer (if you want I remove it) in line 17 is his execution of a repair by repetition of the previous utterance, in the form of an offer, in line 15. This particular repair has been initiated by the caller’s response in line 16 (no that’s ok). The second repair which the agent executes in line 21, though the utterance is already a modified version (but if you want I can just remove it now) of the one in line 17, is again initiated by caller with his inability to attend to the offer during his turns in lines 18 and 20.

With the second repair in line 21, the agent succeeds in getting his point across the caller, as the caller is able to display his understanding of the agent’s intention after the third statement of the offer. However his response in line 22 (Wa, this uh::; the folder that say Castayano) is indicative of his failure to understand that the agent has been referring to his folder, which the agent has been proposing to delete as a way of helping the caller. It is apparent, though, that the pronoun ‘it’ in line 18 is vague, which also prompts the caller to inquire whether ‘it’ means his own folder labeled as ‘Castayano’.

The next segment again shows how a speaker helps a listener in coming to understanding by repeating the non-understood utterance as a form of repair.

*Example of repetition as a repair strategy for a non-understood utterance (with other-initiated repair)*

*Excerpt 7 from Telephone Conversation 3*

```
1  A  Helpdesk met ((name of agent)) (0.3)
2  C  Hello↑ (1.3)
3  A  Helpdesk met ((name of agent)) (0.1)
4  C  Yeah hi, I'm calling from room number five o, o, eet
5  A  Yes↑
6  C  I'm having some problems with my system (.) and I had already complained
7  C  about it having some problems with the profiles ((this segment is inaudible)) and it's not
8  C  working again
9  A  So you have problems with your profile↓ (1.3)
10 C  "Ok" (0.4)
11 A  You have problems with your [profile is my question↑ [yes, ] [yes ]]
12 C  [yeah [yeah] [yeah]
13 A  And you have spoken with your cluster manager or? (1.5)
14 C  Um:: (0.6) I, I don't know actually, I’ve, uh::; uh::, the profile tourist problem is not
15 coming again, but now it seems that my desktop is not accessible and my
16 documents and my computer is all not accessible (0.6)
17 A  It's all not accessible↓
18 C  Ya (.)
```
The call opens with the helpdesk agent establishing her identity for the caller in Dutch (Helpdesk met Cecille). The ‘met’ in line 1 is the Dutch equivalent for the English ‘with’. In this case, it may appear as a surprise that the agent answers the phone call in her native language, considering that the helpdesk operates within an educational institution where almost all its students, aside from their mother tongues, can only converse in English.

However, an informal talk with the agents of the helpdesk reveals that most of the time, the calls they receive are often from their Dutch co-workers, as most international students would rather approach the helpdesk personally to seek technical help when they deem necessary. This explains for the automatic use of the native language on the part of the agent when receiving a call.

What follows is just a ‘hello’ response without the expected self-introduction, then a rather longer pause of 1.3 seconds. The caller’s response in this part could either be a display of her inability to understand the utterance of the agent in line 1, or it could also be a case of non-hearing.

Regardless of the possible explanation for the caller’s ‘hello’ it still proves to be insufficient for the agent to infer whether the caller on the line is Dutch or not, but with an assumption that the caller could be Dutch, the agent deploys a second self-introduction using her native language (Dutch).

This time, however, she decides to increase her speaking volume - presumably because she thinks the incomplete response from the caller in line 2 is due to her inability to hear the agent’s initial introduction. The agent’s strategy appears effective as she immediately gets a complete response from the caller in line 4 (yeah hi, I’m calling from room number five o, o, eet).

The caller’s response, which she phrased in English, eventually prompts the agent to switch her code (in line 5) - in this particular situation, a necessary shift in the usage of a language – from Dutch to English - to accommodate the caller right at the initial phase of the encounter.

It is interesting to note, however, that in line 4, the caller fails to state her name, although she informs the agent of her location during that talk – which could already be taken as a form of establishing her partial identity for the agent’s additional information about her in case a follow up helpdesk encounter is necessary. In that same line, too, the mispronounced ‘eight’ (pronounced ‘eet’ by the caller) is tolerated, as there is no attempt at correction on the part of the agent in the next turn.

The agent’s ‘yes’ (with a rising intonation) utterance in line 5 signals the caller to proceed to her dialogue (Jefferson, 1984), which resumes from lines 6 to 8, as the caller starts to introduce her present problem. In line 6, the caller mentions that she is having some problems with her system and she proceeds to state her problem with the profiles, as contained in line 7. Since the caller cites two ‘problems’ (first, with the system; then second, with profile), the agent attempts to infer from what has been said by the caller that her real problem must be the second one (problem with the profiles). It is, however, possible to claim that in this situation the caller subscribes to the funnel approach in presenting her problem – first general (problem with the system), then specific (problem with the profiles).

In this instance, however, putting finality to an unconfirmed inference would have been a mistake on the part of the agent because such an instance has a potential to trigger misunderstanding as the talk progresses.

In line 9, the agent then constructs her understanding of the caller’s problem and delivers it for the caller to confirm (so you have problems with your profile). After a pause of 1.3 second, the caller responds in line 10 (with ok). Since the statement in line 9 is intended by the agent to have her understanding of the problem confirmed by the caller, she would probably be expecting for a ‘yes-no’ response, as she may have also interpreted the caller’s ‘ok’ as a display of non-understanding.

The caller’s reply, in line 10, to the agent’s inquiry in line 9 is interpreted to be inappropriate, thus the agent restates her previous question with emphasis in line 11 (You have
problems with your profile is my question) presumably after coming to an interpretation that the caller’s ‘ok’ signals her failure to understand the agent’s statement in line 9.

It is interesting, however, that in line 9, the statement doesn’t sound as if it’s a question because it doesn’t possess a rising intonation. In this case, the agent could be expecting for a yes/no response, which according to Kearsley (1976) is one possible answer to a closed-form question characterized by a rising intonation pattern.

The caller’s ‘ok’ response in line 10, as already cited, could be interpreted as a display of her failure to understand that the agent’s statement, in line 9, takes an interrogative rather than a declarative form, thus her reply to the utterance is deemed inappropriate. With this other-initiated form of repair (despite the missing rising intonation that implies questioning), the agent instantaneously executes a repair by repeating her statement with the incorporation of two techniques that differentiate the latest utterance from the previous one: a change in tone (from falling intonation to rising intonation) and an emphasis that she is asking a question for clarification (you have problems with your profile is my question†), which the caller then receives with ‘yeah, yeah’ – eventually restoring the conversation for continuation.

The addition of ‘is my question’ in line 11 appears to be the agent’s way of emphasizing that her utterance is a question, thereby giving the impression that she is urging the caller to give a yes/no response – which the caller responds to in line 12 with the triple production of ‘yeahs’. After acquiring the necessary reply from the caller, the agent proceeds to pose another question in line 13.

The caller, however, announces a delay in answering the new question with ‘um’, and she continues to mention that she actually doesn’t know – in line 14. The caller’s utterance goes on to describe the problem with the profile named ‘tourist problem’, and her difficulties in getting access to her desktop/computer and documents – in lines 14 to 16. Note that instead of answering the agent’s question in line 13 (And you have spoken with your cluster manager or?), the caller seems to be responding to the older question in line 11.

From this, it can be hypothesized that the caller’s ‘yeah’ response is only her attempt to provide an immediate response during her turn to the agent’s inquiry – although it apparently is not the caller’s real answer, as she positions that ‘real answer’ in lines 14 to 16. The distance between the agent’s question and the caller’s real answer indicates the need for the caller to process the question first before transmitting the intended response.

In the analysis of excerpt 7 it is pointed out that the agent does not give enough time for the caller to think about the message received from the agent. This is again reflected in this segment, a pause of 1.9 seconds follows the agent’s utterance in line 9. The time specified would have been necessary for the caller to understand the agent’s talk. The ‘ok’ in line 10 may have been taken by the agent as the caller’s display of non-understanding – as it also appears that the agent seems to be expecting for a different but more appropriate response.

The agent, after receiving the caller’s ‘ok’, seems to be impatient, thus she repeats her utterance, originally positioned in line 9, but with emphasis that this time around she has a question – in line 11 – forcing the caller to say ‘yeah, yeah, yeah’ in line 12, whereas the caller’s real answer should be ‘I don’t know actually’ that is positioned in line 14.

A similar case to further support the claims presented in the prior discussion is the one below which is taken from a recorded call made by a client (whose nationality is not identifiable) who complains about his problem in formatting his computer. In a way, however, the interaction still has a strong intercultural character as the agent is Dutch and the medium for transaction is English.

Example of repetition as a repair strategy for a non-understood utterance (with other-initiated repair)
Excerpt 8 from Telephone Conversation 10

2 C HELLO(.) I've(.) got(.) it's(.) ((name of product))(.) three:: hundred (0.2)
In lines 6 and 7, the caller proceeds to elaborate the nature of his technical problem, which he has already introduced right away in line 2 after positioning a short greeting of ‘hello’. The agent’s ya’s (indicated by an upward arrow) in lines 3, 5, 8, and 10 suggesting to the caller that ‘he can go on talking’ (Jefferson, 1984) is in congruence with Gardner’s claim (1998) that terminally rising ‘yeaahs’ perform a continuative function in the conversation.

It is interesting to note that the way the caller details out his problem is done in a way that accommodates the agent’s ability to process and analyze every aspect of the trouble – as evidenced by the typical fragmentation in the delivery of information which the agent resorts to – the first in line 2, then another in line 4, and in lines 6 and 7, then in lines 9 and 10. Presumably, this is the caller’s approach to prevent the agent from falling into a failure to understand his concern.

For Baker, Emmison, and Firth (2001), the caller’s narrative account is produced in successive turn-constructional units – delivered so as to provide possible transition places for the agent to provide receipt tokens. This idea parallels with the concept of installment by Clark and Brennan (1999), which is done when speakers present a lot of information to be registered verbatim thereby prompting them to generally cut it up into bite-sized chunks or installments. (also Clark and Schaefer, 1989). Clark and Brennan add that dividing a presentation into repeatable installments is based on the tacit recognition that people have limited immediate memory spans.

Eventually in the latter part of line 10 and in line 11 (w(laughs))att (do( I: did?), the caller appears to be admitting that he is partly responsible for the problem. The agent realizes that the caller has not specified the firmware version that is running on this system, thus he asks for it in line 13 (Um::: what firmware version is running on this sys-tem?), which only receives a ‘sorry’ reply, in line 14, from the caller. Again this indicates the caller’s admission of a recognized understanding problem on his part, thus he invites the agent to perform a repair of the non-understood statement to restore the flow of the conversation after a lapse in line 14.

The agent executes the necessary repair immediately in his next turn in line 15 (What firmware version is running...). In turn, the caller expresses understanding of the previously non-understood statement from the agent by deploying a response, in line 16 (um, two point knot four I think), whose first word even overlaps with a term located in the middle of the agent’s question.

Note, however, that the caller’s prolonged ‘um’ opens his response to the agent’s question. Clark and Fox Tree (2002) point out that ‘um’, along with ‘uh’, is used by speakers as a form of announcement that they are initiating what they expect to be a major or a minor delay before speaking. In this segment, the caller’s ‘um’ marks the time when he is still retrieving for the information that the agent is requesting from him.
After a short delay, however, the caller is able to supply the needed information, in lines 16 and 17, (two point knot four I think the latest one) even before the completion of the question. The caller’s ability to give the immediate answer prompts the agent to terminate the question, as he also moves to produce a new utterance, in line 18 (then you should have an int-ternal format::ting op-tion), which already contains a his own assessment of the situation based on the information provided by the caller.

4.2.2 Repair of a non-understood utterance by repetition and modification

The use of repetition continues in this segment, although in this situation, the repeated statement is also modified – which could have been intended by the speaker to deal with an assumption that something in the non-understood utterance has caused the problem.

Example of repetition and modification as a repair strategy for a non-understood utterance
(with other-initiated repair)
Excerpt 9 from Telephone Conversation 5

14 A A-ha and how big must it be? (1.4)
15 C Hhhh I don’t know, something good, I mean, something which is now available
16 [under]
17 A [ Ok ] like a default size to start with? (0.2)
18 C Yeah (0.2)
19 A Something like that?
20 C Sorry I (0.3)
21 A Like a default size that they start with (.) because nowadays they make them very
22 big u-hu
23 C I don’t know (.) [just ] [something] normal [but good
24 A [yeah] [ ok ] [u-hum (0.7)

This segment is taken from a conversation involving an Iranian student soliciting for the advice of a Dutch agent on buying a hard disk. Before she can answer the question of the caller, the agent requests for more relevant information about the hard disk from the caller. In line 15, the caller appears to have insufficient idea about the exact size of the hard disk that she is referring to, as even her reply does not match with the question of the agent (how big must it be?). Instead she describes her ‘ideal’ hard disk as ‘something good’ in line 15, which is rather vague for a description.

The vagueness in the answer of the caller, according to Jucker, Smith, and Ludge (2003), allows her to maintain fluency when she cannot access the information at the point where it is needed in the conversation.

Probably sensing the difficulty on the part of the caller to give an exact description of the size of the hard disk, the agent offers her own description in line 17 (like a default size to start with?), which the caller receives with a ‘yeah’ to indicate her approval of the description. However, when the agent initiates a follow up question (something like that?) in line 19 for confirmation of the caller’s response, the caller fails to deliver the same remark positioned in line 18 (yeah), and instead she signals a difficulty that requires immediate repair.

Egbert (2004) claims that in cases when the hearer recognizes his problem in hearing or understanding, he would usually use the next turn as an opportunity to indicate the problem through a repair initiation – in this segment, the caller’s ‘sorry’ utterance in line 20. It is, then, expected that the speaker of the trouble-source turn would attempt to repair the trouble so that mutual understanding is restored and the conversation can proceed – in this case, the agent repeating in line 21 what she has said in line 17 (like a default size to start with).

A minor revision, though, in the statement in line 17 is the addition of ‘they’ and the omission of ‘to’ before the word ‘start’ in line 21, which drastically changes the meaning of the
new sentence and which the agent could have intended to improve the clarity of her previous utterance – presumably an attempt on her part to improve the understanding of the caller by repairing the older assertion.

The statement in line 17 (like a default size to start with?) sounds more of an introductory expression – an attempt on the part of the speaker to begin a description of an item under discussion. However, the modification of that same statement with the inclusion of ‘they’ implies that the agent means to say something else.

With the repeated but already revised utterance what she intends is to convey a bit of information about the default size of the hard disk in the beginning. More interesting, however, the second part of line 21 already contains further information (because nowadays they make them very big) to justify the statement in the first part of the same line.

It is apparent, therefore, that the repair initiation from the caller in line 20 (sorry1) yields a three-part repair operation on the part of the agent: repetition of an earlier statement, improvement of the clarity of the previous statement, and the inclusion of new information in the new statement.

The execution of the necessary repair spurs the conversation to continue with the caller admitting that she has no knowledge about the size of a hard disk – in line 23 (I don’t know just something normal but good).

Another segment to further confirm the popularity of repetition as a repair mechanism in dealing with non-understanding is the one below which is still part of the recorded conversation between a British client and a Dutch agent.

Example of repetition as a repair strategy for a non-understood utterance (with other-initiated repair)
Example 10 from Telephone Conversation 9

57 A "Ya" (1.1) ok w-well what’s the writer that you have now, is it a dee vee dee writer or
58 a cee dee writer? (1.7)
59 C It’s (,) cee dee rewriter (0.6) ‘if I have now° (1.3) it’s (,) the um::: (1.1) five two three
60 two key (0.5)
61 ➔ A °Ah ok° (2.1) um::: so the Nero Smart Start, ted doesn’t start up because (0.3) it’s
62 ➔ telling you that there some parts are missin (1.4)
63 ➔ C Sorry I didn’t get that (0.5)
64 ➔ A So the Nero:: smart (0.2) start (0.3) e won’t (,) start up (,) be-cause some (,) parts are
65 ➔ missin::°g° (0.3)
66 ➔ C Ya (0.9)
67 A Na ok° (0.7)

The exchange of turns proceeds smoothly from lines 57 to 60, until line 61 which contains the agent’s follow-up inquiry in this portion of the talk.

At this point, the agent’s utterance pertaining to the reason for the software’s failure to start up is a point of clarification for what the caller has already stated in the preceding segment of the conversation (refer to line 47 of the transcription for telephone conversation 8 in the appendix section). It makes sense to claim this time that the agent’s utterance in lines 61 and 62 ("Ah ok° um::: so the Nero Smart Start, ted doesn’t start up because it’s telling you that there some parts are missin) is not actually a new assertion but an invitation for the caller to validate the initial understanding of the agent.

Line 63 shows the caller’s difficulty in processing the agent’s statement in lines 61 and 62 – thus instead of deploying a ‘yes-no’ answer to confirm or disconfirm the agent’s statement for clarification, the caller only replies with ‘sorry, I didn’t get that’. That admission of inability to process the agent’s utterance on the part of the caller signals the urgency for the agent to execute a repair of the problematic talk.
The invitation to repair, which is clearly contained in the statement in line 63, prompts the agent to contain the repairable by repeating his previous utterance in line 61. However, this time, the speaker, as shown in lines 64 and 65, transmits his message with so much attention to the production of lexical items for the turn – by moderately pacing the delivery of the words, as indicated by pauses in between words and word stretches.

Such an approach from the agent could have been shaped by his assumption that the caller did not get his first statement in line 61 because it was delivered in a somewhat hasty manner – as indicated by minimal pauses within the utterance. Thus for the caller to understand his statement, the agent has to moderate the pacing of his talk to enable the caller to catch every word of the statement, thereby ensuring that the caller can understand the utterance.

Note also that in lines 64 and 65, the agent repairs his problematic utterance positioned in lines 61 and 62. What the agent has done is not only verbatim repetition of the non-understood utterance but also a display of his proficiency in detecting the flaw in the structure of his statement, which propels him to edit the defective utterance (‘it’s telling you that there some parts are missing’ is rectified with ‘…won’t start up because some parts are missing’).

The repair mechanism used by the agent to restate his point, in lines 64 and 65, proves effective as the caller is able to respond approximately – which fuels the continuation of the talk.

### 4.2.3 Repair of a non-understood utterance by clarification

There are instances when the utterance from a participant in the interaction is either too defective or too confusing. The repair for these problematic utterances is also initiated by the recipient who fails to understand what the speaker is trying to convey. The two segments below concretized this claim.

**Example of clarification as a repair strategy for a non-understood utterance (with other-initiated repair)**

Excerpt 11 from Telephone Conversation 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Caller</th>
<th>Agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to this segment, the caller has already oriented the agent to the nature of the problem which triggers the call. In this excerpt, the agent is already instructing the caller to press a button to ease out the difficulty in formatting the hard drive.

Lines 40 to 44 contain the instructive utterances from the agent and interestingly he refrains from hastening in the formulation of his instructions as shown by pauses at almost regular intervals and some cases of sound stretches. This could be hypothesized as the agent’s scheme to accommodate the caller’s effort to understand the agent’s instructive utterances.

Lines 42 to 44 are particularly important because they are allocated for a description and direction of the steps that the caller should perform. In line 43, the agent stresses the word ‘down’ to differentiate it from the prior word ‘top’ to avoid confusing the caller, since the two terms have obviously polarized meanings.

The agent may have his own mental frame of the term ‘top down’ button which is not shared by the caller in this situation – which further results to the caller’s difficulty in making
sense of the verbal stimulus (top down button), thereby restraining him from immediately acting out after the instruction has been articulated.

However, the phrase ‘top-down button’ may not be the only culprit that is responsible for the failure of the caller to click the appropriate button right away. Lines 42 and 43, which are still part of the agent’s turn, are certainly abounding in ‘buttons’. Here the speaker says that the caller should press the F3 button, which he describes to be the right button, and which is under the navigator button, or top-down button.

It is possible, from the previous discourse, that the agent’s multiple mentioning of ‘button’ has adverse consequence on the caller’s mental processing, as it spurs him to profess his confusion in line 45 (N, which are the but-ton?). This request for clarification is another indication of the caller’s attempt to signal the agent that there is another troublesome utterance that requires immediate repair.

Recognizing that the caller has not understood which correct button to press, the agent immediately initiates a repair, in line 46, by clearly indicating to the caller that the lowest button should be pressed, which the caller, in turn, acknowledges with an ‘ok’ in line 47.

What the agent actually does, according to Hirst et al. (1994), is the performance of a linguistic task of referring to some object or idea that involves collaboration between the speaker and the hearer. In this case, Hirst et al. (1994) add, the speaker has a goal of having the hearer identify the object that the speaker has in mind – which therefore necessitates for the speaker to construct a description of the object which he thinks will enable the hearer to identify it.

However, that same line 47 (Ok the… the) again shows a problem on the part of the caller to locate the button, as indicated by the sudden termination of his incomplete utterance. The caller’s inability to state the missing term or phrase to complete his ‘ok, the, the’ utterance could also be a manifestation of his difficulty in locating the specified button. This consequently triggers the agent to convey a short description of the button’s location in line 48 (on the front).

When the agent extends the description of the button in line 48, he is just doing what Clark and Brennan (1999) call as establishing a referential identity – the mutual belief that the speakers have correctly identified the referent. The caller admits understanding in line 49 (um-n’ya the last) which allows the conversation to proceed.

The second segment also contains a case of non-understanding that one party in the conversation, the speaker of the non-understood utterance, repairs after the recipient who succumbs to non-understanding initiates a repair by clarification. An Indian student states his plan of buying a hard disk right after the opening phase of the phone conversation.

Example of clarification as a repair strategy for a non-understood utterance (with other-initiated repair)
Excerpt 12 from Telephone Conversation 7

6 → C “Not” (0.4) just (0.3) the big one (0.2) which is more cheaper not the one (0.2) small
7 → one (.) from the laptop bhh (1.0) do you have any idea how that w’k’n um: much
8 → money do I need? (0.4)
9 → A Um:: (.) for this (.) you mean the small one or the big one? (.)
10 → C The big (.) one (0.3) the big one is (0.2) cheap (0.3) er, right↑ (.)

In this case, the problem begins in lines 6 and 7 with the caller’s confusing utterance. He starts his statement with ‘not just the big one’, which could be interpreted that he doesn’t prefer to buy a big hard disk. The continuation of the phrase, however, is ‘not the one small from the laptop’, which again could imply that he doesn’t like to buy the smaller hard disk. This really appears problematic, as it is also difficult to understand his preferred size for a hard disk.

With such a problematic utterance, clearly characterized by a defective construction of the sentence, the agent displays his difficulty in responding to the question of the caller – as the caller is asking for the price of the hard disk (in lines 7 and 8), which is still not specified whether it
should be a big or a small one. An other-initiated repair is then deployed in line 9, as the agent exhibits his inability to understand the point of the caller about the size of the hard disk that he intends to buy.

The agent's request for clarification in line 9 (Um::: for this you mean the small one or the big one?) signals the caller that this utterance prior to the repair-initiation is flawed. Then in line 10, the caller positions a correction by asserting that he plans to buy a bigger hard disk because it is cheaper - although he also requests for verification whether what he thinks is right, as shown in the last of line 10.

In this next segment, the speaker utters a word whose meaning may not be shared by the recipient. Upon realizing that differences in meanings attached to an utterance (a word or a phrase) could be a potential factor for the inability of the recipient to display his understanding, the speaker feels obliged to deliver his attached meaning of the utterance to establish a common perspective with the listener. Consider this brief conversation below between a Swedish client and a Dutch agent.

Example of clarification (by providing a definition of a lexical element with an ambiguous meaning) as a repair strategy for a non-understood utterance (with other-initiated repair)

Excerpt 13 from Telephone Conversation 11

42 A  Zet↓ (0.9) "um" (.) ok n’ what is wrong with (.) the (.) moni-tor? (0.5)
43 → C  "It’s" (0.3) dead↓ (0.6)
44 → A  Dead↑ (0.4)
45 → C  "Ya (1.7) it’s (0.4) not (0.3) d’ open-ning (0.4)
46 A  "Ok" (.) ok (.) may I have your phone num-ber (.) in (.) Swe-den (.) please↓ (0.6)

After getting the necessary information about the problematic product from the Swedish caller, the agent proceeds to ask the caller to state the specific problem of the monitor, in line 42. The caller, in line 43, responds by declaring that the monitor is dead. In the next turn, the agent decides to repeat the word ‘dead’, with a terminally raising intonation – which could imply something of questioning (Kearsey, 1976).

In line 45, the caller decides to provide an explanation for the ‘dead’ word ((ya it’s not d’ open-ning), which could have been caused by his interpretation that the caller’s utterance in line 44 is a request for explanation of the caller’s use of the word ‘dead’ to describe the status of the monitor.

If the assumption that the agent has really recognized a problem in the utterance of the caller in line 43 is admissible, then we can argue that the agent’s utterance in line 44 is a form of a repair initiated by the listener (the agent), by saying ‘dead’ with a rising intonation presumably implying that he needs further explanation for a term whose meaning he fails to understand.

In response to the invitation for repair, the speaker (the caller) positions as explanation during his turn, in line 45, eventually resulting to the restoration of the talk after a momentary lapse.

After the repair, in the form of an elaboration or explanation of the word ‘dead’, the agent replies with an ‘ok’ in line 46, which signifies his acceptance of the brief explanation offered by the caller.

When speakers realize that what he has said is not immediately understood by the listener, he resorts to description to provide the listener with a concrete picture of what he has in mind. In this segment, the agent is telling the caller to give him the serial number of the monitor, but the callers seems to have a hard time understanding where and what it is.
Example of clarification (through the process of localization) as a repair strategy for a non-understood utterance (with other-initiated repair)

Excerpt 14 from Telephone Conversation 11

102 → A "No° (.2) o-k (. ) may I have this (.4) serial number (. ) of (. ) this (. ) moni-tor (. )
103 → please (1.5)
104 → C "Serial num-ber° (.3)
105 → A That’s (. ) also (. ) on the back
106 → C "Yeow:: (. ) "yup° (.5) "ok° (3.0)

As indicated in line 102, the agent realizes that he needs to take note of the serial number of the caller’s monitor before they go deeper in their discussion of possibilities to contain the problematic equipment. It is apparent that upon receiving the request for the serial number from the agent, the caller shows evidence of his inability to understand the ‘thing’ that the agent is asking for. Note that in line 104 the caller says ‘serial number’ ("Serial num-ber") in a low voice, as if asking ‘where can I find it?’.

The agent’s utterance in line 105 (that’s also on the back) would have been different if the caller was able to process the request positively in line 104, by either saying these hypothetical responses – ‘ok I’ll check on it’ or ‘here it is’. The utterance, therefore, in line 104 serves as an invitation for repair, which the agent accepts by indicating to the caller where the serial number is located (that’s also on the back).

The initial claim that the caller indeed has failed to understand ‘serial number’ is confirmed in line 106 (yeow…yup…ok) with his utterance that seems to imply ‘ok, now I know it’ just after acquiring a hint from the agent on where to find it.

Initial Summary of Findings for Sub-chapter 4.2

From the analysis of the segments presented in this section, it is revealed that speakers of a non-understood utterance employ varied strategies in repairing problematic statements and lines to facilitate interlocutors in reaching the desired understanding. The segments presented further lead to the point that it is always the recipient of the non-understood utterance who displays his deficiency in understanding what the speaker has recently said.

In relation to the first point is the finding that in a number of cases the participant who succumbs to non-understanding appears to be attributing the problem to himself. This is evident in the number of instances when the participant who did not understand the utterance of his partner deploys a ‘sorry’ during his turn to assume the guilt of failing to understand. The ‘sorry’, and including ‘pardon’ or ‘what’, Drew (1997) claim, is employed by a participant to indicate that he has a difficulty with his partner’s prior turn, but without locating specifically where and what the difficulty is.

The research also looked into the causes of non-understanding in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative speakers of English. A number of the analyzed segments show that non-understood utterances are usually those that have ‘defectively’ constructed - the sentence structure is faulty or it is vague and confusing.

It is also revealed that the mismatch in the meanings attached to a lexical item or concept by both the speaker and the recipient can lead to non-understanding.

A display of difficulty in understanding on the part of the recipient serves as an initiation of a repair, which the speaker of the non-understood utterance may accept by executing the necessary repair or reject by moving on to a new utterance with the non-understood utterance uncorrected. The analyzed segments, however, disclose that during helpdesk encounters, where
the agent and the caller are nonnative speakers of the language in use, the source of the problematic turn does not hesitate to correct the non-understood utterance to help the recipient achieve understanding.

In helping the listener understand better the non-understood utterance, the speaker may execute the necessary repair by repeating a non-understood utterance, by repeating and modifying a non-understood, by clarifying a confusing utterance, by providing a definition of a lexical element with an ambiguous meaning, or by describing a non-understood item or object being referred to during the talk.

Of further interest in this subchapter is the finding, as shown in a number of cases, that agents are not too conscious in providing the caller with ample time to understand and think about the agent’s utterances, thus the caller is forced to give an immediate response even if he does not mean it.

4.3 How do participants in helpdesk encounters prevent problems of misunderstandings and non-understandings?

Hirst et al (1994) and Weigand (1999) contend that not everything is said explicitly in a dialogue, as participants in a conversation are also limited in the amount of information that they can make explicit, which obviously results to utterances to have incomplete information. It has been mentioned by Allwood and Abelar (1984) that the absence of some relevant information in an utterance is one factor behind misunderstanding and non-understanding. Such a reality, therefore, requires participants in an interaction to be wary of avoiding potential cases of misunderstanding and non-understanding that could have adverse consequences on an on-going talk.

The list of studies that focus on the importance of repair in handling communication problems is long, but the attention given to approaches in preventing the inception of misunderstanding and non-understanding, for instance, is not so substantial. Clark (1994) introduces the ‘concept’ of preventatives to define what interacting participants do to restrain misunderstanding or non-understanding from ever occurring during and within the conversational act.

However, in his article ‘Managing Problems in Speaking’, Clark (1994) focuses on prevention techniques that are employed by the speaker alone. In this research, however, what is shown are cases when the interlocutor (the recipient of the talk or the caller, in this instance), too, tries to avoid the pitfalls of misunderstanding and non-understanding using different techniques.

4.3.1 Prevention of misunderstanding by requesting for confirmation of the received information

Heritage (1984) refers to this request for confirmation as a form of ‘understanding checks’, which identifies a trouble with a previous turn’s talk by proposing a solution to that trouble. Gonzales-Lloret (2005) also classifies understanding checks or confirmation checks as a type of a repair initiation. However, from the example below, it is too inappropriate to claim that such a request for confirmation is only a form of repair, because in accordance to the definition of repair by Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), repair is used after a problem in understanding has been identified. Consider the segments presented here.

Example of preventing misunderstanding by requesting for confirmation of the received information

Excerpt 15 from Telephone Conversation 7

13 A Um:: (0.4) let me give you an () indi-cation↑ () it might () be hhhh (1.1) a little bit
The segment above is taken from a recorded telephone conversation between an Indian student and a Dutch agent, as the two parties are discussing about the price of a hard disk. Upon knowing that the student intends to purchase a big hard disk because it is cheaper than the small one, the agent instantaneously checks for the price of the specified item on his computer.

However, prior to the actual checking of the price through his computer, the agent first attempts to give an instant information about the price based on what he personally knows, in line 13 (Um:: let me give you an indi-cation↑ it might be hhhh); however when after an admission that his estimation may not be correct, in line 14 (a little bit less or a little bit more but for instance...oh one moment), he decides right away to refer to the computer to give the caller an accurate information about the price.

After obtaining the price information from the agent, the caller replies by ‘echoing’ the amount that is stated in line 16 (one hundred seventy euros), which the agent responds to with a ‘ya’ in line 18. In line 19, the caller again restates the size of the hard drive (‘For two hundred’), which the agent again receives with a remark of approval - ‘ya’.

The agent’s deployment of ‘ya’ in this context is hinting that he approves of the caller’s clear reception of the information. Bangter, Clark, and Katz (2004) mention that ‘yeah’ can be used by a participant in the interaction to acknowledge or display agreement with prior utterances.

The act of echoing of selected but perceived to be highly relevant information is a manifestation on the part of the listener to prevent misunderstanding. This is not just a simple case of meaningless repetition but it actually shows the listener’s attempt to inhibit the inception of misunderstanding, or, even non-understanding, within the dialogue. His preventative approach involves requesting for confirmation of what has been received through the conversational act. In this segment, the caller wants affirmation of what he understands that a hard disk of 400 gigabytes would cost him 170 euros.

This approach of prevention is again evident in the next segment, which is a continuation of the dialogue in the previous page.

Example of preventing misunderstanding by requesting for confirmation of the received information
Excerpt 16 from Telephone Conversation 7

The discussion about the price of the hard disk continues, with the caller again requesting the agent to confirm his understanding that if he intends to buy the hard disk he needs around 200 euros, as shown in line 24. The agent validates the caller’s statement in line 25 with a ‘ya’, as he proceeds to inform the caller that if he wants a hard disk with a bigger storage capacity (300) the price would be 249.

In line 25, the agent mentions numerical values without figures (if I look at the three hundred it says two hundred forty nine), so the caller fixes his next utterance, in line 27 (“Two hundred forty nine for three hundred gigabytes”) as an attempt to clarify the points in the
utterance of the agent to prevent a potential problem in understanding. The agent’s remark in line 28 (ya) is an affirmation of his willingness to cooperate with the caller in preventing understanding problems that might possibly occur in any part of the talk.

Following Grice’s maxim of relation (as quoted in the article of Martinich, 1980), when the speaker’s contribution has relevance, he is not expected to provide more information than is necessary, and if he does then it implies that the information provided is not necessary. In the segment presented above, the caller appears to have violated this said maxim by echoing what the agent has said. However, this violation also seems to have served its purpose – that the caller would like to be assured that his understanding of the agent’s utterance is correct, which could be a manifestation of his desire to prevent or avoid misunderstanding.

4.3.2 Prevention of misunderstanding by requesting for clarification

Just a while ago, it is mentioned that in conversations not everything is explicitly said, however unsaid and unstated lexical items and information may be important for an interlocutor to reach full understanding during the talk. So when the interlocutor realizes that some items that are considered important in preventing non-understanding and misunderstanding are missing in the utterance of the speaker, he would request for it to attain the real purpose of the conversation. The segments that exemplify this second technique of preventing non-understanding or misunderstanding are presented in the succeeding pages.

Example of preventing misunderstanding by requesting for clarification and additional information

Excerpt 17 from Telephone Conversation 6

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Now I (.) say okey (.) just (0.5) sh’ll play the movie but ask (0.2) for the (.) a:: six:: er</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>fields:: code (1.3) and:: uh, I don’t have (0.3) a (.) clue I have three buttoms (0.3) by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>now (.)</td>
<td>activate or can-cel (.) ((laughter)) (.) ((laughter continues)) (.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>(phrase is inaudible))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 → A</td>
<td>Ya (0.2) um::: w’l that’s a very strange (.) thing (0.3) a:: (0.3) it is on a lap-top</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 →</td>
<td>[or its on a (.) desktop↑</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>[ya its just on a pee cee that you got (0.2) that I got from ITC (0.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ya↑ hhhh (1.0) well that’s strange because usually you give y’l get that um::: (.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>installed and but during the installation (.) the code is [entered (.) and (.) it’s even jun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>the code is longer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>than the six charac-ters you mentioned hhhh (0.2) um</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>No ti charac sec ses (.) six fields, ha (.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The caller, an Argentinian, decides to contact the helpdesk of his institute, as he has a problem with a software for burning DVDs. The investigation about the nature of the problem continues until it reaches this segment that is selected for analysis. From lines 25 to 28, the caller is still describing the difficulty encountered with his system.

It is interesting that in line 26, the caller says ‘buttoms’ instead of ‘buttons’, but the Dutch agent does not position an attempt to correct the caller’s faulty pronunciation. Instead, the agent just takes his turn with a display of his understanding of the caller’s talk, as indicated in line 29 (ya, um::: w’l that’s a very strange thing).

The prolonged ‘um’ in the agent’s utterance marks his display of a decision to slow down with his response, as he may still be framing a fitting definition of the caller’s problematic case. Still in line 32, the comment ‘w’l that’s strange thing’ is clearly the product of a careful formulation, on the part of the agent, of how to describe what the caller has mentioned in line 24. It has already been cited that according to Clark and Fox Tree (2002), the production of ‘um’ with the utterance is an announcement by the speaker that there would be a delay in his turn.

In lines 29 and 30, the agent finds it necessary to ask for another information he deems necessary to help him come up with a more precise diagnosis of the problem (is it on a lap-top or
its on a desktop). The caller’s response to the inquiry is immediate, though it contains a case of immediate self-repair of an *unhearable* error (ya its just on a pee cee that you got that I got from ITC). Instead of ‘you’ the first person ‘I’ is used to mean that he, and not the agent, got the personal computer from the institution. Such an action is also the caller’s attempt at preventing problems with understanding that could be attributed to him.

The agent’s request for further information in lines 29 and 30 is also a demonstration of his concern for the achievement of complete understanding by soliciting for what he thinks is missing in the details provided by the agent. This instance also illustrates how a participant in an institutional interaction, such as a helpdesk consultation, can assume the role of a vigilant listener by ensuring that pieces of information that are spelled out are complete to prevent the inception of a potential misunderstanding or non-understanding problem as the talk advances.

In lines 32 and 33, the agent takes his turn to explain to the caller why he thinks the problem is ‘strange’. When the agent mentions the word ‘character’ in line 35, the caller takes his turn to execute a repair of the agent’s erroneous use of a word (not ti charac sec ses six fields) – to indicate that the agent must have misheard what he has said in the previous part of the talk, because the word is character, and not ‘code’ which the agent mentions. The caller is right is this case because he actually means characters, and he never mentions fields. The agent just positions a remark to indicate his acknowledgement of the caller’s correction, in line 37 with ‘ok’.

Although other correction is a strong threat to the ‘face’ of the speaker of the problematic utterance (Brown and Levinson, 1987), the agent acknowledges the correction from the caller for the success of the interaction. As Norrick (1991) cites, other correction does not necessarily severe face if the first speaker attaches greater value to factual corrections or to the task at hand than the considerations of face.

The next segment, again taken from a recorded phone conversation between a Swedish client and a Dutch agent, also illustrates a situation when one participant in the conversation attempts to prevent misunderstanding or non-understanding by requesting for clarification.

*Example of preventing misunderstanding by requesting for clarification and additional information
Excerpt 18 from Telephone Conversation 11*

133  →  A  And I have (.): reference number (.): for you↑ (0.3)  that (.): is (0.8) pap-pap
134  →  (0.2)  four (1.0)
135  →  C  (9.2)  One moment*: (0.3)
136  →  A  Yes↑
137  →  C  (9.2)  (saying the phrase 'reference number' like a whisper) and (.): that's is for the
138  →  swapping↑ (0.5)
139  →  A  Ya that is (.): for the (.): swap-ping↓ (0.2)  yes:. (1.0)
140  A  Pap-pap (.): four (1.3)
141  C  What? (0.7)
142  A  (And*) (.): that is (0.3)  the number (0.2)
143  A  Pap-a:. (0.4)  four (1.0)
144  C  Pee (.): four (0.3) ↓
145  A  Pee (.): four↑ (0.4)

In the previous phase of this talk, the agent has already informed the caller that his defective monitor will be swapped, though the actual date for the swapping is not yet known. Line 133 shows the agent telling the caller to take down a 'reference number'. Recognizing that he needs a writing implement to jot down the number from the agent, the caller requests to halt probably so that he can get a pen and paper for writing, in line 135 (one moment) – to this request the agent just deploys a remark of approval in line 136 (yes↑).

Presumably realizing that he needs to indicate that the number is a reference for something, he decides to write the phrase 'reference number' before getting the complete number.
This in evident in the same line, as the caller says the line 'reference number' to himself in a rather low voice, which further implies that he is dictating the phrase to himself while writing during the pause of 9.2 seconds.

It can be seen, however, that in lines 137 and 138, the caller asks for a clarification whether the reference number is for the swapping that they have been talking about or for something else. Although the agent’s statements in the prior turns did not include the information that the reference number is for the swapping, it is clearly inferable that the reference number in this discussion is for the swapping. In this case, the agent must have assumed that the caller will eventually understand that the reference number is for the swapping.

However, in this instance, as indicated in lines 137 and 138, (that's is for the swapping†), the caller does not seem to trust his own understanding, thus he inquires to verify whether he is correct in his understanding or not. In a way, this is already the caller's approach in preventing a potential misunderstanding, or even non-understanding, in the latter part of the on-going conversation. The agent, in turn, cooperates with the caller by affirming the caller's understanding.

When the agent starts to repeat the first part of the reference number (pap-pap four) in line 140, which has been uttered first in lines 133 and 134, the caller then deploys an indication of his inability to catch the agent’s utterance by positioning a 'what' - another manifestation of an invitation for the agent to execute a repair of his statement in line 138. This request for a repair appears a bit delayed because the caller did not even give a signal of his difficulty in making sense of the 'pap-pap four' verbalization in line 133.

It is not so easy to claim, though, whether the ‘what’ question signals the difficulty on the part of the caller in hearing the utterance of the agent in line 140 (pap-pap four) or his failure to understand the purpose of the number. The second premise, however, seems weak because it would be impossible to hypothesize that he must have not understood the purpose of the reference number since the agent has already informed him, in line 139, that the said number is for the swapping.

Nevertheless, with the ‘what’ remark from the caller, as his invitation for a necessary repair, the agent does not hesitate to execute a repair, in line 142, by telling again the caller for the second time around that the reference number he is about to give to the caller is for the swapping. When in line 143 the agent again states the first part of the reference number (Pap-a: four), the caller then display his understanding of ‘pap-pap’ as representing the letter ‘P’, in line 144, which the caller, in turn, acknowledges in line 145.

Example of preventing misunderstanding by requesting for clarification and additional information
Excerpt 19 from Telephone Conversation 1

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>The (.) only thing you have (.) to do (.) is to select the (.) correct (0.3) day (.) of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>today ↑ (0.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>°Aha°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 →</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Then you can find yours: (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 →</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>So there is a icon on the (.) desk: (0.2) top or what? (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A shortcut on the desk-top (0.2) to the loca::tion (0.3) where the presentations [are]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>[ya ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An Iranian student, who is preparing for her presentation, needs to store a presentation file for use during the day. She contacts a Dutch agent from the helpdesk for assistance.

The utterance in lines 26 and 27 implies that the agent has already completed the steps in saving the caller’s presentation file to a designated folder, which the caller’s responds to with an ‘uhu’, in line 29, to show her understanding of the agent’s instruction. An upward rising arrow after the statement in line 27 signifies that the agent is still intending to finish his turn, which is briefly interrupted by the caller’s ‘aha’. Line 30 contains completion of the agent’s utterance; and
immediately in line 31, the caller positions a question to be certain whether an icon on the desktop will indicate where she can find her file.

In the same line, the phrase ‘or what’ denotes the caller’s inability to locate the right word during her turn – so to prevent a delay in her utterance an ‘or what’ is used to signal the agent that she doesn’t have the right term to use in that instance, which the agent might even try to specify in his next turn.

Although there is no incidence of misunderstanding or non-understanding in this segment, what is shown is another example of a participant trying to prevent the episode of a problem in understanding breakdown throughout the course of the conversation or even after it. The agent’s use of the word ‘shortcut’ is his attempt at correcting the caller’s ‘icon’, although it basically functions as a mechanism to cooperate with the caller’s effort to attain full understanding of what the agent is telling her. A ‘ya’, in line 33, that overlaps with the agent’s last word in line 32 (are), in this case, is a form of receipt from the caller that the agent’s utterance has been accepted.

Initial Summary of Findings for Sub-chapter 4.3

In Clark’s (1994) discussion, preventatives are mostly used by the speaker of the ‘problematic utterance’ before the recipient can detect errors in the received message. What this section tried to prove is that even the participant who assumes the receiver’s role in the interaction can resort to prevention after the receipt of a message from the speaker – and this message may be deemed a factor for possible misunderstandings or non-understandings.

When the speaker would like to be assured that his understanding of the message is correct, he may position an attempt at preventing possible understanding problems by requesting for a confirmation of his understanding or interpretation of the utterance from his conversational partner. If that same recipient recognizes that some details or pieces of relevant information are unintentionally omitted from the utterance of the speaker, he may also request for clarification or additional information.

In the segments presented, preventatives are positioned in cases where there are no cases of misunderstanding and non-understanding. The argument, with substantial backing from Clark (1994), is that they are employed even before the occurrence of understanding problems – thus the ultimate purpose of preventatives, or prevention mechanisms as sometimes referred to in this research, is to restrain the inception of misunderstandings or non-understandings within, during, and, even after the conversation.

The application of preventative mechanisms is an expression of the interacting participants’ concern for clarity, correctness, and precision, especially in helpdesk encounters where conversations are carried out to handle somehow complex and highly equivocal matters over the phone.

The difficulty, however, with the concept of prevention is the complexity in recognizing it during or within the talk. For instance, when a caller repeats a part of the agent’s utterance, it can be taken as a simple act of echoing to fill the caller’s turn while he is still in the process of constructing a response for his partner.

As conversational analysis does not enable the analyst to look into the head of the speaker to determine whether his utterance really has the purpose of avoiding understanding problems or it is just a filler utterance, it may be helpful to consider, therefore, the context for the conversation to have an insight into the purpose of an utterance – and this would be possible with the aid of discourse analysis.
5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chapter presents a summary of significant findings that resulted from the thorough analysis of segments containing cases of misunderstandings, non-understandings, and their repair or prevention mechanisms. The selected segments are taken from recorded calls made in a commercial center and a helpdesk of an educational institute located in Enschede, The Netherlands.

In this chapter, the limitations of the present research are also presented, while recommendations for further studies related to this research are discussed.

5.1 Conclusion and Summary of Findings

The qualitative approach of conversational analysis enables the extraction of substantial amount of data from the transcribed recorded helpdesk calls and the said data have provided answers to the basic questions of this research. The presentation of the important findings from this research is in accordance with the sequence of the stated research problems.

5.1.1 Causes of misunderstandings and how they are repaired

For the first inquiry, the focus is on the factors behind the occurrence of misunderstandings in helpdesk encounters over the telephone involving nonnative English speaking agents and clients. The earlier assumption is that misunderstandings that are inherent in the interaction between individuals who agree to use a secondary language, in which they are not really proficient, can be attributed to the interacting participants’ relative unfamiliarity with the language’s phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and grammar.

However, the analysis of the segments from the available recordings reveals that misunderstandings that occur in nonnative English speakers’ interaction are not attributable to the participant’s defective sentence structure, faulty pronunciation, wrong use of lexical elements or poor vocabulary, and insufficient knowledge of grammatical rules.

It is, instead, known that cases of misunderstanding in helpdesk conversations, as shown in the analyzed recordings, are caused by false beliefs, erroneous inferences from the speaker’s utterances, and incomplete information. This further indicates that the occurrence of misunderstanding in NNS-NNS conversations is not at all different from that of NS-NS conversations.

In response to the second question of this research, the analyzed segments also disclose that repair is usually initiated by the recipient of the problematic utterance, which then enables the source of the trouble to execute the necessary correction to contain misunderstanding, thereby restoring the flow of the conversation. This is to say that misunderstandings that are found in the data for this research are repaired through the initiative of the participant in the interaction who believes he or she has been misunderstood.

With the initiation of a repair, the participants who unknowingly succumbs to misunderstanding eventually admits that he or she has just misunderstood his or her partner in the conversation – and such an admission explains for his or her instantaneous execution of the needed repair for him or her to attain correct understanding.

A couple of segments, however, also show that any participant can also display his problem of misunderstanding the utterance of the other, thus allowing the partner in the interaction to help the other who misunderstands to reach correct and complete understanding.

Using the classification of Bazanella and Damiano (1999), misunderstandings can be related to the listener or the speaker. Majority of the misunderstandings in the segments are related to the listener, and in those cases the speaker just allows the listener to correct his or her
erroneous interpretation of the speaker’s utterance – just after the speaker has initiated a repair that can either be accepted or rejected by the listener.

In this research, nevertheless, other-initiated repairs are always accepted by the speaker of the trouble source and he or she immediately executes the necessary repair or correction.

5.1.2 Causes of non-understandings and how they are repaired

The research also looked into the causes of non-understanding in helpdesk encounters involving nonnative speakers of English. A number of the analyzed segments points to the finding that non-understood utterances are usually those that are ‘defectively’ constructed - the sentence structure is faulty or it is vague and confusing.

It is also revealed that the mismatch in the meanings attached to a lexical item or concept by both the speaker and the recipient can lead to non-understanding. These findings imply that in the case of non-understanding, the cause can be within the domain of linguistics.

From the analysis of the segments presented in this section, it is also revealed that speakers of a non-understood utterance employ varied strategies in repairing problematic statements and lines to facilitate interlocutors in reaching the desired understanding. The segments presented further lead to the point that it is always the recipient of the non-understood utterance who displays his deficiency in understanding what the speaker has recently said.

Such a display of difficulty in understanding on the part of the recipient serves as an initiation of a repair, which the speaker of the non-understood utterance may accept by executing the necessary repair or reject by moving on to a new utterance with the non-understood utterance uncorrected. The analyzed segments, however, disclose that during helpdesk encounters, where the agent and the caller are nonnative speakers of the language in use, the speaker does not hesitate to correct his non-understood utterance to help the recipient achieve understanding.

In helping the listener understand better the non-understood utterance, the speaker may execute the necessary repair by repeating a non-understood utterance, by repeating and modifying a non-understood utterance, by clarifying a confusing utterance or a part of that same utterance, by providing a definition of a lexical element with an ambiguous meaning, or by describing a non-understood item or object being referred during the talk.

5.1.3 Prevention as an alternative to repair

Although repair is commonly performed after the occurrence of a problem, such as a misunderstanding or non-understanding, in this study, however, it is known that participants in helpdesk encounters also use a strategy that restrains misunderstanding and non-understanding from ever occurring. The strategy called prevention is borrowed from Clark (1994) who coins the term ‘preventatives’ to refer to inoculations or interventions ‘in averting anticipated but avoidable problems’ in conversations – misunderstandings and non-understanding being prime examples.

Clark, however, focuses his definition of preventatives as being deployed by the speaker himself – and this would be evident in cases of self-repair where problematic utterances, for instance, are immediately corrected before being detected by the recipient. After analyzing the recorded calls for this research, however, a pattern of prevention which the listener executes surfaces to the fore.

In helpdesk encounters, when the agent and the caller are exchanging information relevant to the formulation of a possible solution to a particular problem or concern that instigates the call, both parties are cautious that pieces of information transmitted and received are correct and complete to ensure full understanding during the talk or consultation, or even after it. The analyzed segments show cases when either the agent or the caller tries to prevent potential cases of misunderstandings and non-understandings.
The results further show that participants in helpdesk encounters attempt to prevent the inception of misunderstandings or non-understandings by requesting for a confirmation of the received information and by soliciting for a clarification and additional information.

Lloret-Gonzales (2005) categorizes clarification requests and confirmation checks (which corresponds to what is termed here as ‘confirmation of the received information’) as repair initiation types. The counterargument, however, using the findings from this research is that both are not repair initiators because, as the analyzed segments have indicated, they are not employed to remedy a problematic utterance.

What is evident from the data is that requests for clarification and confirmation of received information are also carried out before the occurrence of misunderstandings or non-understandings. This would suggest that requests for clarification and confirmation can be both strategies for repair and prevention.

The position of the deployed requests, therefore, suggests that conversational problems are better prevented first than repaired. These requests correspond to what Kurhila (2001) mentions as the concern for a higher level of accuracy in institutional interaction, such as a helpdesk encounter, especially when it is over the phone.

The difficulty, however, with the concept of prevention is the complexity in recognizing it during or within the talk. For instance, when a caller repeats a part of the agent’s utterance, it can be taken as a simple act of echoing to fill the caller’s turn while he is still in the process of constructing a response for his partner.

As conversational analysis does not enable the analyst to look into the head of the speaker to determine whether his utterance really has the purpose of avoiding understanding problems or it is just a filler utterance, it may be helpful to consider, therefore, the context for the conversation to have an insight into the purpose of an utterance – and this would be possible with the aid of discourse analysis.

We close this discussion by quoting McRoy and Hirst (1995), in relation to the complexity in identifying the purpose of a particular utterance:

“The problem of interpreting an utterance involves deciding what actions the speaker is doing or trying to do. This process involves not only looking at the surface form of an utterance – for example, was it stated as a declarative? – but also at the context in which it was uttered. This context includes the task that the participants are involved in, the prior beliefs that they had, and the discourse itself.”

5.1.4 Other significant findings outside the scope of the research problems

The analyses of the transcribed recordings and their segments also yield findings that do not address the specified research problems.

First, a number of speech defects (mispronunciations, grammatical inconsistencies, faulty sentence construction, and errors in lexical use) committed by a speaker are left uncorrected during the helpdesk encounter. This is would imply that the participants who are both nonnative speakers of the language in use avoid evaluating each other’s language proficiency.

A second finding points to the phenomenon of self-repair or correction in the conversations. It is revealed that speakers who realized that they have committed phonic, syntactic, or grammatical errors often resort to self-correction immediately during the turn that contains the error.

The analysis of the transcriptions also disclosed that the conversations between nonnative English speaking agents and caller are hardly disturbed by their differences in linguistic abilities – recognizing that in some instances one participant has a better proficiency in terms of language usage than the other, as also indicated in the recordings. This coincides with Firth’s finding (1996) that participants in a lingua franca interaction ‘do work’ to divert attention from the surface
features of talk, and are differentially able to disattend to encoding difficulties and linguistic
infelicities.

In the case of non-understanding, the participant who succumbs to non-understanding
appears to be attributing the problem to himself. This is evident in the number of instances when
the participant who did not understand the utterance of his partner deploys a ‘sorry’ during his
turn to assume the guilt of failing to understand the utterance of his conversational partner.

In some of the analyzed segments, it is also shown that agents are not so conscious of
giving callers enough time to understand and think about the utterance of the agents. When an
agent asks the caller something, the caller is just prompted to give an answer, even if he or she
does not mean it, just to be immediate in responding to the agent’s utterance – which could be the
caller’s strategy to subscribe to politeness.

5.2 Limitations of the Present Study

A number of problems have surfaced during the before and during the conduct of this research.
Since this study is conducted in the Netherlands, where the dominant language is Dutch, it was,
at first, almost impossible to have access to English calls since most call centers and helpdesks in
the Netherlands transact with their clients in Dutch. Although there are some call centers that
cater to the English market, the existing Dutch policy protecting privacy also made it difficult for
the researcher to obtain these English phone calls.

The option was to gather recordings from the helpdesk of one international educational
institute, but the probability of a foreign student phoning the helpdesk of his school was rather
low during the actual collection of the necessary recordings. This explains for the minimal
amount of recordings that have been included for this research. With the smaller set of recordings
for analysis also come slimmer chances of deriving substantial amount of segments that contain
cases of misunderstanding and non-understanding.

With the use of existing recorded phone calls from a commercial center, it was also
difficult to identify the nationalities of some participants in the conversations. This has affected
the consistency of the data since the intention is to focus on helpdesk conversations involving
nonnative speakers of English only. However, some clients and agents (whose nationalities are
not known) in the recorded conversations are suspected to be native speakers based on their
accents.

It has also been found out during the course of this research that attributing problems of
misunderstanding and non-understanding to the linguistic competencies or deficiencies of
participants is difficult using conversational analysis with its descriptive nature. Establishing the
relation between understanding problems and the language competence of the interacting
participants entails the use of a more interpretative method such as discourse analysis.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

After a discussion of the problems that have been encountered in the course of conducting this
research, some points to consider for further research are outlined here.

Although Seedhouse (1998) argues that the basic methodological principles of
conversational analysis can be applied to foreign language interaction in the same way as to free
conversation and to institutional talk, Firth (1996) has pointed out, two years before Seedhouse
published his claim, that the assumption of order at all points emanating from stable and
developed communicative competence - typical of monolingual talk data – appears to be less
secure when the analyst is confronted with talk produced by people with less than stable, or
native-speaker-equivalent, competence.

The descriptive nature of CA certainly allows the analyst to see the differences between
interacting participants, in terms of socio-cultural aspects, as the talk progresses; however CA
also doesn’t assume the function of looking into the factors behind the moves and the actions of
the participants during the conversation.

For instance, as revealed in the study, participants have not positioned attempts at
correcting the prior defective turns of their partners, and by defective turns they mean utterances
that contain errors in pronunciation, grammar, and word usage. The use of CA, in this case,
makes it difficult to know why a nonnative English speaking participant would not correct the
error of his conversational partner who is also a nonnative English speaker.

Understanding the relationship between the two nonnative speaker’s knowledge and use
of a second language and the patterns of their conversations would require going beyond the
confines of conversational analysis – perhaps this would mean applying conversational analysis
in the first phase, and then using discourse analysis in the second phase to explore the structure
behind surface conversations.

In this study also, participants in recorded talks come from diverse cultural and linguistic
background, and it is certain that there are substantial differences between these people. For
instance, the recordings have callers with different nationalities, while the agents are all Dutch,
though some in the recordings have ‘questionable nationalities’. It would be so difficult to
generalize that the findings here are true to every nonnative English speaking helpdesk
encounter. What is suggested, therefore, is that a different study with the same nature as this one
would be pursued but considering the consistency and homogeneity of the data - for instance, a
study on the interaction between Dutch agents and Swedish clients using English.

It would also be substantial if more cases of misunderstandings and non-understandings
in nonnative speaker encounters would be included for analysis to really provide stronger
foundation for the discussion of findings. This would entail the inclusion of more data to allow an
in-depth analysis of more cases representing the phenomena selected for such a study like this one.

The introduction of the concept of prevention (to avoid understanding problems) on the
part of the recipient of a message is also something that needs to be explored further. It is pointed
out in this study that the difficulty with this concept is in really determining whether an
utterance, for instance, is constructed to prevent the occurrence of misunderstanding or it is just
transmitted by the speaker as a simple echoing act to take his turn. Since CA is not in the trade of
interpreting the intention of an utterance during the dialogue, the suggestion is to utilize
discourse analysis to understand and prove whether an utterance is indeed a preventative or just
a turn-filler in the course of the helpdesk encounter.
REFERENCES


Das, A. (2003). Knowledge and productivity in technical support work. Management Science,


Tanburn, J. & Singh, A.D. (2001). ICTs and enterprises in developing countries: Hype or


This is a list of symbols that have been used in the transcriptions of collected recordings for analysis. The listing is based on the transcription notations used by Psathas (1995), Drummond & Hopper (1991), and Atkinson & Heritage (1984).

[ ] - brackets are used to indicate overlapping utterances; with the left bracket positioned at the beginning of the overlap, while the right bracket at the end of the overlap

stress - underlining indicates stress or emphasis

stre::tch more - colon indicates the extension of the sound; multiple colons indicate a prolonged or extended sound

downward and upward pointing arrows indicate marked falling and rising shifts in intonation, respectively

(0.8) - numbers enclosed in single parentheses denote pauses in conversation expressed in seconds and tenths of a second

( . ) - a dot enclosed in single parentheses denote micropauses - and for this research, pauses less than two tenths of second (0.2)

°quiet° - a word enclosed in degree signs indicate a passage of the talk quieter than the surrounding talk; or the word or phrase was said more quietly than the surrounding talk

h hh hh hh - h’s indicate audible breathing both outbreathing and inbreathing

pt - this symbol indicates an audible lip smack

(( meaning)) - double parentheses are used to enclosed a description of some phenomenon which the transcriptionist does not want to contend; such a phenomenon could be the details of the conversational scene or the characterizations of the talk

? - the question mark retains its function of ending an interrogative statement
### Telephone Conversation 1

**Location:** ITC, Enschede

**Situation:** An Iranian student is preparing for her presentation on that day but nobody is around to help her save her presentation file to an accessible folder. She calls the helpdesk and was helped by a Dutch agent. Lines 26 to 33 comprised a segment that contains an example of a caller resorting to prevention, by requesting for clarification, during the helpdesk consultation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Utterance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Met (name of agent) ↑ (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Hi Ard, this is Rosanna ↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Hi (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Ee, I'm going to begin to put my presentation (.) nobody is here (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Nobody is there↑ (.) you are now downstairs↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Ya (0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ya (0.4) you have it already on the tee drive↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Ya (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ok, then let me have a look (1.2) &quot;and tee&quot; and [then↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>[and tee, there is a directory called</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Danish (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>In the auditorium↓ (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>&quot;Let me&quot; go to the right (0.5) folder (1.9) &quot;mys first presentations&quot; (0.2) auditorium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>(0.3) to:day is Wednes:::day (1.5) &quot;then I'll put it there and I put there&quot; (0.5) the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>(0.2) presentations of (0.3) today (0.2) in the auditorium (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>&quot;Ya&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ok it's there↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>It's (.) already done (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ya (0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>When y'r in the audi::torium you (.) will find (0.3) t-the: (.) uh, short-cort (0.2) to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>specific locations↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>&quot;Aha&quot; (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>The (.) only thing you have (.) to do (.) is to select the (.) correct (0.3) day (.) of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>today ↑ (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>&quot;Aha&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Then you can find yours: (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>So there is a icon on the (.) desk: (0.2) top or what? (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A shortcut on the desk-top (0.2) to the location (0.3) where the presentations [are]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>(ya )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Pro'bly I shall check it now because now the ((inaudible word)) &quot;is getting empty&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>That's maybe a good thing to have a [quick] look (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>[yeah ] ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>If there's any question (.) just call me (.) and I can come down (0.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The agent takes his turn in lines 26 and 27 to inform the caller how she can find her presentation file on the computer, which the caller then acknowledges in line 29 (aha). Line 30 contains the continuation of the agent's utterance, which is briefly interrupted by the caller's acknowledgement marker (aha). The caller proceeds to her turn in line 31 to request for a detail or information, which is not contained in the statement of the agent - the indication to help her locate her file. The agent responds, in line 32, to the request by supplying the needed information that will indicate the location of the presentation file of the caller, which the caller also acknowledges by expressing her understanding of the agent's utterance.

Telephone Conversation 2

Location : ITC, Enschede

Situation : A student from Cuba is having a difficulty in deleting the contents of his folder, thus he decides to call the helpdesk of his school for the needed help. In the course of the conversation, the Dutch agent offers his help by suggesting that he can delete the contents himself so that the problem would be solved. The conversation from line 8 to line 23 illustrates a case in which the agent thinks his utterances have been misunderstood by the caller by not attending to them, thus the agent performs a repair to contain the non-understanding by repeating his offer thrice until the caller is able to attend to offer for help.
UT 12 A  Uhhh let’s (%) say standard↑ within seven days (%) they will get
13 C removed automatically↑ (0.3)
14 C Aha↑ (0.5)
15 A Or↑ (0.5) if you: as you do now (%) call me (%) I can remove it for you↑ (0.7)
16 C No that’s ok (0.3) [so……………………………………… ] ip we, ip we (0.3)
17 A [if you WANT I can remove it ]
18 C E we, e we (0.3) il wil (0.5) ahhmm sorry, it will removening in seven days? (0.5)
19 A Ya↑
20 C Ok^ ()
21 A But if you want I can just remove it now (0.9)
22 C Wa (%) this aaaaa, the folder that say Castayano?
23 A Ya, I see it (0.3)
24 C Ya, just removing aaaa the (0.1) file the content (0.2) of the folder (0.6)
25 A The folder itself I can just leave it? (0.8)
26 C Uhhh (0.2) no no no (0.5) only the (%) content (0.4)
27 A Only the content (0.3)
28 C Uhhh ()
29 A It’s gone already^  
30 C So one from (%) up (%) side (0.3) want to put (0.2) some (%) thing (%) in (0.5) in (%) that
31 folder (1.7) eeee (%) he need to have da pasw or and so on (1.2)
32 A Ummm (%) to (%) that’s in the incoming (%) Ummm (%) anonymous user can
33 always read(th) from there (1.6)
34 C But no put data there (%) 
35 A Not put data (%) they need the ITC just as in password for the one I think you
36 have been using that to be [guessed] and
37 C [eeeee ] they guess and [they
38 A [for you
39 A They’ to prepare for you
40 C Ok ()
41 A Ya
42 C Ok, well thank you very much ()
43 A Ya (0.3)
44 C Bye

✦✦✦✦ End of Transcription ✦✦✦✦

Segment for Analysis

| UT with SIR | 8 | C | Eeee (%) am trying (%) to: (%) delete (0.7) eeee (%) different (%) file (%) that I (%) put (0.3) in the: (%) ep ti fa ep ti pi site (%) |
| RFCo | 10 | A | Ya (%) but you cannot↑ (0.5) |
| Q1 with RN | 11 | C | Ok (0.3) then (0.6) I (0.4) I need to list the ray there? (0.5) |
| QR | 12 | A | Uhhh let’s (%) say standard↑ within seven days (%) they will get |
| 13 | removed automatically↑ (0.3) |
| AC | 14 | C | Aha↑ (0.5) |
| UT & TS 1 | 15 | A | Or↑ (0.5) if you: as you do now (%) call me (%) I can remove it for you↑ (0.7) |
| UT with RN | 16 | C | No that’s ok (0.3) [so……………………………………… ] ip we, ip we (0.3) |
| TS 2 | 17 | A | [if you WANT I can remove it ] |
| Q2 with SIR / | 18 | C | E we, e we (0.3) il wil (0.5) ahhmm sorry, it will removening in seven days? (0.5) |
| QR | 19 | A | Ya↑ |
| AC | 20 | C | Ok^ ()
| TS 3 | 21 | A | But if you want I can just remove it now (0.9) |
| OIR / RFCI | 22 | C | Wa (%) this aaaaa, the folder that say Castayano? |
| RE | 23 | A | Ya, I see it (0.3) |

UT - Utterance  RFCo - Request for Confirmation  RN - Request Non-response
Lines 8 and 9 contain the statements of the caller as he is presenting his problem to the agent. The agent assumes his turn in line 10 requesting for the caller’s confirmation of the agent’s understanding of the caller’s problem. In line 11, the caller fails to respond to the said request and instead proceeds to a new utterance, which the agent answers in lines 12 and 13. The caller delivers a receipt of acknowledgement for the new information from the agent in line 14 (aha), while the agent positions his first proposal of help, which then becomes a problematic utterance, in line 15.

The agent considers the caller’s utterance in line 16 as inappropriate for the proposal in line 15, thus the agent again repeats the proposal for help in line 17, which is now the second trouble source for this segment. Instead of attending to the agent’s repeated proposal, the caller positions a second question, which is just actually his way of requesting the agent to confirm whether he understands the agent’s information (in lines 12 and 13) correctly or not. This time, the agent takes his turn in line 19 to answer the caller’s question, which the caller also acknowledges in line 20 with ‘ok’.

In line 21, the agent reiterates his willingness to help the caller, the segment’s third problematic utterance, which the caller responds to with a request for a clarification - eventually becoming an other-intiated repair, enabling the agent to specify that all the while he has been proposing to the caller that he can remove the folder named ‘Castayano’.

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**Telephone Conversation 3**

**Location**: ITC, Enschede

**Situation**: Another student from India has a problem with accessing her profile, as the system is also not accessible. The Dutch agent asks her if she has discussed the problem with cluster manager, to which the student responds that she has not yet talked to the person. The agent informs the caller that she would phone the student’s manager first so that he can also help the student in solving the problem. Lines 6 to 12 contain a case of a caller failing to understand the utterance of the agent.

```
1  A  Helpdesk met ((name of agent))↑ (0.3)
2  C  Hello↑ (1.3)
3  A  Helpdesk met ((name of agent)) (0.1)
4  C  Yeah hi, I'm calling from room number five o, o, eet
5  A  Yes
6  C  I'm having some problems with my system () and I had already complained
7  about it having some problems with the profiles ((next phrase unclear)) and it's not
8  working again
9  A  So you have problems with your profile↓ (1.3)
10 C  Ok↓ (0.4)
11 A  You have problems with your [profile is my question↑ [yes, ] [yes ]
12 C  [yeah [yeah,] [yeah ]
13 A  And you have spoken with your cluster manager or? (1.5)
14 C  Um:: (0.6) I, I don't know actually, I've, uh::, uh::; the profile tourist problem is not
15 coming again, but now I think that my desktop is not accessible and my
16 documents and my computer is all not accessible↓ (0.6)
17 A  It's all not accessible↓
```
Transcription

18 C Ya (0.2)
19 A And um::: you can log in? (.)
20 C Ya, I'm ready to log in (.) but that's all I can do
21 A Ok and what is your user name?
22 C Guthari (0.3) Gee you tee etch ee ar ay, one five five four o
23 A Oh that's too fast, can you repeat that please? (0.5)
24 C Yeah. Ke - yo (0.2)
25 A Yeah
26 C Tee - etch (0.2) tee - ar - way (1.4)
27 A Ok (0.1)
28 C One (.) five, five (0.4)
29 A Yeah
30 C Four, O (0.7)
31 A [Four, O ]
32 C [Yeah ] (1.3)
33 A Ok, and, and, and which course are you in?
34 C E S
35 A Ok (0.20 hhhh um::: let me see, let me see, um::: (.) your cluster manager is
36 Mister Mulder↑ (0.2)
37 C Mulder (0.6) ok (0.4)
38 A And (0.8) um::: uh, I will contact him (.) so you are in room five and then (0.2)
39 C Um::: (.) room five (.) um::: o-o et
40 A O - o eight (.) ok (0.2)
41 C Yeah (1.6)
42 A I'm going to try to reach him mm (0.4) Mister Mulder he is also (0.1) um::: located on
43 the fifth floor (0.3)
44 C "U-hum"
45 A Um::: (0.3) but you do you know his, he…?
46 C No (.) I don't know him actually (0.4)
47 A Oh, ok, hhhh (0.8) U-hum [hhhhh
48 C [so where do find him? (0.6)
49 A Yeah, he has (0.2) uh, when you walk out the elevators on the fifth floor (.)
50 C Ok
51 A And you walk straight ahead (0.2)
52 C U-hum
53 A Then the first door on your right (.) before the, the flapping doors (0.4) there's
54 where he is, where he is sitting (0.2) (0.2) um::: (0.3) I can try to reach him right
55 now so I can him from here hhhh (.) so I can sends (0.4) uh, this message so he
56 will walk to you (0.2)
57 C ok (.) hhhh (0.3)
58 A He, if ever, if anything goes wrong (0.2) so can also go to him
59 C u-hum
60 C Ok
61 A Yeah, so Mister Mulder
62 C Mulder↓
63 A Mulder (0.4) but I will contact him, I will send, send him to you (.) Yeah↑
64 C Ok. Thank you so much.
65 A Ok
66 C Yeah
67 A Bye bye

End of Transcription

79
Segment for Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UT</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>I'm having some problems with my system (.) and I had already complained about it having some problems with the profiles [next phrase unclear] and it's not working again</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>RFCo / TS</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIR</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>“Ok” (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>You have problems with your [profile is my question↑ yes, ] [yes ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>yeah [yeah,] [yeah ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UIT -Utterance RFCo - Request for Confirmation OIR - Other-Initiated Repair RE - Repair Execution RA - Repair Acknowledgment

The caller takes her turn in lines 6 to 8 to state the nature of her problem, which prompts her to call the helpdesk. In line 9, the agent structures her utterance intended to be a request for confirmation of her understanding of the caller’s problem, which the caller tries to respond to with ‘ok’ in line 10.

The mismatch between the agent’s utterance and that of the caller’s is responsible for the transformation of the agent’s utterance in line 10 from a request to a trouble source, while the caller’s response becomes an other-initiated repair - which also expresses the caller’s failure to understand the intention of the agent’s utterance. The agent immediately performs the needed repair by repeating her previous utterance and by emphasizing that with that statement she intends to ask a question that she expects to be answered by yes or no. The repair execution is acknowledged in line 12 with the caller positioning her response (yeah, yeah, yeah) to the agent’s inquiry.

Telephone Conversation 4

Location : ITC, Enschede

Situation : The conversation is between two colleagues of an international institute – C1, a Chinese, is a secretary in of the offices of the aforementioned institute; while C2, a Dutch, is helpdesk agent who is asking for clarification regarding the problem of an African student. The segment from this conversation illustrates an instance when one party in the conversation reaches a wrong interpretation of the utterances of the agent. In this case, too, the party who is subjected to misunderstanding realizes the trouble only after the other signals the need for repair.

1   C1  Tina↓
2   C2  Hi this is Cecille
3   C1  Hi
4   C2  I have question (0.3)
5   C1  Ya
6   C2  [Um:. (0.5) Harriett, er, Zulu (0.5) has a, a smart card but only three, uh, numbers, are tho, on there (0.5)
7   C2  and I need more numbers for the (0.5) student number (0.8)
8   C1  Ya but it should be there (0.3) it’s, eh, under his, her name () is that right? (0.7)
9   C2  HHHH (0.4) Yeah, it’s, i, i, on the card?
10  C1  O ya, ok, moment, yeah ok, I know why, because they, they dint inform us (0.4)
11  C2  [A-ha
12  C1  [Everything was in rush, ok, now I know, ya, just, I, I, I, will let you know, yeah?
13  C2  Ok I will [wait ]
15  C1  [yeah ]
16  C2  Yeah, ok bye
17  C1  Bye

End of Transcription

Segment for Analysis

| UT  1 | 4  | C2 | I have question (0.3) |
| AC   | 5  | C1 | [Ya] |
| UT 2 with SIR | 6  | C2 | [Um: (0.5) Harriett, er, Zulu (0.5) has a, a smart card but only three, uh, numbers, are] |
| TS with SIR | 7  | C1 | tho, on there (0.5) |
| OIR  | 8  | C2 | and I need more numbers for the (0.5) student number (0.8) |
| RE 1 | 9  | C1 | Ya but it should be there (0.3) it’s, eh, under his, her name (?) is that right? (0.7) |
| RA   | 10 | C2 | HHHH (0.4) Yeah, it’s, i, i, on the card? |
| RE 2 | 11 | C1 | O ya, ok, moment, yeah ok, I know why, because they, they dint inform us (0.4) |
| RE 2 | 12 | C2 | [A-ha] |
| RE 2 | 13 | C1 | [Everything was in rush, ok, now I know, ya, just, I, I, I, will let you know, yeah?] |

UT - Utterance  AC - Acknowledgement  TS - Trouble Source
SIR - Self-Initiated Repair  OIR - Other-Initiated Repair  RE - Repair Execution
RA - Repair Acknowledgment

In line 4, C2 states her reason for calling, which C1 acknowledges in the next line. Then from lines 6 to 8, C2 details out the concern, which centers on the incomplete student number of an African student. C1 insists that the student number should be under the name of the student, and this statement becomes the trouble source after C2 negates the claims of C1 - C2's utterance, in this case, becomes an other-initiated repair – in line 10.

With an invitation for a repair from C2, C1 immediately repairs the error in lines 9 by admitting that she misunderstands what C2 has said, as she has a different thing in mind. C2 acknowledges, in line 11, C1’s correction in the form of admission, while C1 proceeds to the second part of her repair execution in line 13.

Telephone Conversation 5

Location : ITC, Enschede

Situation : A student with a mid-eastern nationality is planning to buy a hard disk but she has no idea about the features of the item. She calls the helpdesk to ask for the agent’s advice. The segment, from lines 14 to 24, illustrates a case of non-Understanding caused by a perceived defect in the sentence structure of the speaker.

| 1  | A  | Helpdesk met ((name of agent))↑ (0.6) |
| 2  | C  | Hi Cecile, this is Rosanna (0.2), he |
| 3  | A  | Hello (0.5) |
| 4  | C  | Hello, I just, he, he (0.2) wanted to have your advise [(0.2) on the (0.5) |
| 5  | A  | [u-hum] |
| 6  | C  | Eh, what do you think about, uh, how much would be a price of a, of a hard disk |
| 7  | C  | (0.5) if I want to buy a harddisk, a computer hhh (0.4) not with the, with the |
| 8  | C  | monitor and keyboard and everything just only the harddisk ? (0.7) |
A  Hhhhh are you talking about second [hand] [hard] disk or are you talking about a
[no]  [no]
C  A new one
A  "A new one"
C  Yeah (0.3)
A  A-ha and how big must it be? (1.4)
C  Mmmm I don’t know, something good, I mean, something which is now available
[under]
A  [Ok ] like a default size to start with? (0.2)
C  Yeah (0.2)
A  Something like that?
C  Sorry↑ (0.3)
A  Like a default size that they start with (.) because nowadays they make them very
big u-hu
C  I don’t know (.) [just ] [something] normal [but good
A  [yeah] [ ok ] [u-hum] (0.7)
C  Ok (.) can you wait, [er, ] just a:: [few seconds?
A  [yeah] [ yes sure
C  Alright ((Conversation in Dutch)) (19.0)
A  Hhhhh (. ) Rosanna↑
C  Yeah (0.2)
A  Um (.) um (.) nowadays, um, to start with is six hundred gee bee↑ (.)
that would be around eighty euros (0.7) hhhh
C  [u-hum
A  And you can, you can buy through ((Ardere Herbergen)) (0.4) the purchase
department
C  [U-hum
A  Or you go into the town to the [Media Markt (.) and then you have it today (0.7)
C  [U-hum
A  So, the, the, um, the brand of, of what we use here is the ‘Max Stalk’ (0.4)
C  Max Stalk (.) you know (.) um (.) because (.) uh (.) this is, this is, the (.) I mean I
need a (1.0) you know I need another computer (.) I have a laptop↑ (0.2)
A  Yeah
C  And I need another (.) I’ll though (.) I have a three hundred eighty six, e, second
hand in my room , I mean (0.4) the old one which was (0.6) but the:. (0.4) I was
thinking to talk with my supervisor to (0.4) to have another computer because one
of them is already busy with programming (0.7)
A  Ok
C  You know [and it always running program I [cannot do any job
A  [yeah] [ so it’s for, it’s for ITC
C  Yeah (.) um yeah
A  Ah::: ok::: for another (0.2) computer if I want to buy because (.) um:: (.) my monitor
is fine (0.2) I mean the keyboard n’
everything (.) I just need a powerful computer (0.2)
A  [yeah ] yeah
C  If I can work with it (.) I mean (.) this one is (0.2) three [hundred] eighty six (0.2)
A  [yeah ]
C  and it’s so slow hhhh (0.5) if I was [thinking] how much be would the price of the
A  [ yeah ]
C  new one (0.5) I can replace this (.) with (0.2) the (0.4) I mean (0.2) if I should (.) d’pek
(0.2) uh, du approval of the supervisor (.) of course (.) [but then (0.2)
A  [yeah
C  I (.) I (.) just wanted to know how much (.) uh:::(.) should I invest from my bertsor
(0.2) you know (0.3)
Uh yeah (0.2) yeah (.) yeah (0.6) so you also want to know the (.) price of a standard (.) standard (0.3) new ITC (.) pee cee (1.1)

Yeah (0.4) and this is (0.2) only you gave me the hard (.) disk (0.2) yeah↑ (.)

That is the::: something you want to know (0.3) and then um::: (1.6)

Because I want to know how much we will lee (0.2) if only the pee cee↑ (0.2)

Uhum (0.8)

Not to be lap (.) not with the monitor and the keyboard and everything (.) I just only the (0.4) stand you know (0.4) the stand pischob itself (0.6) so I can replace, uh, I mean (.) if I get the approval (0.3) then I can replace this one with a new one (1.0)

Ok if I look at the IT (.) price list::: (0.2) um::: (.) a (.) pee cee (0.2)

Yeah↑ (0.5)

A standard ITC pee cee (.) w'll be around::: (0.5) six hundred twenty (.) five (.) euros↑

Uhum (0.8)

And::: um::: (0.5) I'm (.) I'm also thinking that (.) you can contact your (.) a cluster manager (0.2)

Uhum (0.7)

Hhhh um::: maybe to us (.) if, if (.) if, if (.) if he (0.3) he's gotten a::: an extra (0.2) to, to use (.) maybe (0.2) that's an idea also (.)

Yeah (0.4) thanks (0.3)

So (.) yeah (.) think, think about those things (.) and (.) if you need more advice on (0.3) how (0.2) and and (0.8) things (0.4) then, uh, (0.3) ya you can come here and talk with us (0.7)

Yeah ok (.) so (0.2) if I want (0.2) to buy only ( ) this is (.) the six hundred is only the PC (0.3) not with monitor (.) not keyboard and nothing (.)

Yeah (0.3) uh, well um::: (0.6) standard (.) means (.) that you get (0.3) now some keyboard and (.) um::: not with the monitor (0.3) ha↑ (0.6)

Keyboard (.) and mouse (0.4)

Uhum (0.4)

Ok (0.4)

Then you have a Pentium Four (0.8) and then it (.) three (0.2) point (0.3) two gigahertz for speed

Ok

Yeah

Ya (.) ya

Ya (0.2)

Ok (.) thank you very very much ((name of agent)) (.)

Ok (.)

Thank you very much

Welcome

[Bye

[Bye

End of Transcription

Segment for Analysis

Q 14 A A-ha and how big must it be? (1.4)
QR with SIR 15 C Mmmm I don't know, something good, I mean, something which is now available

[under]

CU 17 A [Ok ] like a default size to start with? (0.2)
AC 18 C Yeah (0.2)
RFCo / TS 19 A Something like that?
OIR 20 C Sorry↑ (0.3)
In line 14, the caller continues to pose another question, which is a continuation of the previous segment. The caller’s response is located in lines 15 and 16, which also contains a case of self-initiated repair (I don’t know, something good, I mean, something which is now available..). Line 17 shows the agent attempting to help the caller in formulating the phrase to say – and here we call that collaborative utterance. The caller approves of the agent’s description, in line 18 with a ‘yeah’.

However when the agent requests for a confirmation in line 19, the caller fails to delivers the same ‘yeah’ response during her turn in line 20 (sorry). The caller’s response in line 20 then becomes an other-initiated repair, while the agent’s statement in line 19 is the trouble source. The agent immediately executes the repair in lines 21 and 22 by repeating and modifying her problematic utterance earlier. The caller validates the success of the repair execution in line 23, with her response (I don’t know just something normal but good), then the agent also positions an acknowledgment receipt in line 24.

### Telephone Conversation 6

**Location :** ITC, Enschede

**Situation :** An Argentinian student has a problem with a software for burning DVDs so he is prompted to call the helpdesk of his school. The Dutch agent tries to help the caller by proposing to contact one of the personnel of the school but the student claims that he has tried solving the problem with that person. The agent, instead, tells the student to wait for the software, which is borrowed by another student, so that he can use it to repair the problematic ‘burning software’. Lines 22 to 34 are of interest because they constitute instances of repair and prevention (other-correction) performed by both the agent and the caller.

1. A Met ((name of agent)) (0.4)
2. C Ya, Gary speaking
3. A Hi Gary (.)
4. C Hem, Ard (1.0) [question a::: few (1.0) um::: weeks ago I got this new a::: computer
5. A [yeah
6. C (1.0) um::: (0.8) the Nero Version (0.4) did not work and I manezh to repair it [yes[^]
7. A [yeah↑
8. C (0.5) I want to (.) I mean (0.2) the idea is to (0.2) to burn (0.3) some dee vee dees
9. ([laughs]) (0.5)
10. A Ya::: (0.3)
11. C And::: (.) then I want to see the dee vee dees (.)
12. A Ya↑ (0.2)
13. C and::: the:: any (.) time I (.) put it in (.) there’s only (.) soft (.) ware that (0.2) is able (.)
14. to o-pen that (0.2) thing is call (0.3) ASUS (0.2) dee vee deee↑ (0.4)
A Ya (.) it's a dee vee dee movie (0.4)
C Yes (.) ya (.) it's a dee vee dee movie (.) correct (.)
A Ya (0.6)
C Now (0.2) a:: um:: (0.2) it requires a:: (0.2) a:: (.) code (0.5) here (1.0)
A It is not (.) okey (0.2) it it (0.7) asks you for a ( ) code (.) right now (.)
C Which (.) yes:: (.) uh I because I just ( ) is ( ) the the first ( ) time:: (.) I ( ) star-ted ( ) it
to (0.2) I just put the DVD in there and immediately (0.2) only this ASOS DVD (0.2)
A [ya]
C open alone (0.4) ya↑ (0.2)
A Ya
C Now I (.) say okey (.) just (0.5) sh'll play the movie but ask (0.2) for the (.) a:: six:: er
( ) fields:: code (1.3) and:: uh, I don’t have (0.3) a (.) clue I have three buttons (0.3) by
now (.) activate or can-cel (.) ((laughter)) (.) ((laughter continues)) (.)
((phrase is inaudible))
A Ya (0.2) um::: w'l that's a very strange (.) thing (0.3) a:: (0.3) is it on a lap-top
C [ya its just on a pee cee that you got (0.2) that I got from ITC (0.2)
A Ya↑ hhhh (1.0) well that’s strange because usually you give y'I get that um:: (.)
C installed and but during the installation (.) the code is [entered (.) and (.) it's even jun
the code is longer
A than the six charac-ters you mentioned hhhh (0.2) um
C No ti charac sec ses (.) six fields, ha (.)
A ok
C And in, in next field probably you have to enter five or six characters (.) I don't have a
cue hhhh (0.9) but um::: (0.2) you say that it should be working there (.) [no↑ (0.2)
A [ya
A And also that ok six (.) fields (.) that's even more strange (.) be-cause (.) you've aways
just one string hhhh (0.8) [um::: (0.6) well what I think is the best is that
C [naa
A Wht yrr rmrn reinstore quickly on y'r a computer (0.6)
A Wa, wa, wa, wa, how can I do that? (.)
A Um:: (.) ya I have a cee dee here but what I can do is to (.) is to contact Gerard
C hhhh (0.3)
C No, G-Gerard is very busy (0.2) i'd I try to solve the problem with Gerard (.) um::: (.)
A [uh:: um::: (1.0)
A [ya
A Because I’d have one cee dee here with the, with the (.) software I lend it to Sheriff
C Amar he's going to return it today hhhh (0.8) so what I can do maybe is to call him
A now↑ (0.4) to check if he has the dee vee dee software (0.2) with him↑ (0.3)
A Ya↑ (0.3)
A If he can submit it to me and that case (.) if yes↑ (.) I can just contact you and maybe I
can just lend the cee dee to you (0.2)
C Ya (0.2) ok di dis w'ld do (.) e, thank you very much
A Ya, ok, ya
C Ya see you later
A B-bye

----------- End of Transcription -----------

Segment for Analysis

UT with SIR 25 C Now I (.) say okey (.) just (0.5) sh'll play the movie but ask (0.2) for the (.) a:: six:: er
( ) fields:: code (1.3) and:: uh, I don’t have (0.3) a (.) clue I have three buttons (0.3)
by now (.) activate or can-cel (.) ((laughter)) (.) ((laughter continues)) (.)
((phrase is inaudible))
RR with SIR 31 C [ya its just on a pee cee that you got (0.2) that I got from ITC (0.2)
UT with TE 32 A Ya↑ hhhh (1.0) well that's strange because usually you give y'1 get that um:: (.)
33 installed and but during the installation (.) the code is [entered (.) and (.) it's even
34 jun the code is longer
35 than the six charac-ters you mentioned hhhh (0.2) um
OC 36 No ti charac sec ses (.) six fields, ha (.)

UT - Utterance  SIR - Self-Initiated Repair  RFAI - Request for Additional Information
RR - Response to Request  TE - Error in Terminology  OC - Other Correction

From lines 25 to 28, the caller takes his turn to describe the nature of his problem, though it is interesting that the erroneous use of the word ‘buttons’, probably to mean ‘buttons’, is left uncorrected – by either the caller himself or the agent. The agent assumes his turn, in line 29 and 30, by stating his opinion about the caller’s problem, which proceeds to contain a request for additional information (is it on a lap-top or its on a (.) desktop) – a typical situation during technical consultations, as the agent aims at acquiring complete information from the caller in an effort to fully understand the problem that requires immediate solution.

The caller delivers the requested information in line 31, with the agent receiving it with a ‘ya’, although he continues his turn, from lines 32 to 35, to state why he thinks the problem of the caller is ‘strange’. In line 35, the agent uses a wrong terminology (character), which the caller instantaneously corrects in line 36 (No ti charac sec ses six fields, ha).

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**Telephone Conversation 7**

*Location : ITC, Enschede*

*Situation : A student from Indian wants to buy a hard disk but he has no idea about the price of the item. He calls the helpdesk for advice. In the second part of the call, the student tells the agent about his problem laptop because of its problem in partitioning. Three segments for analysis are derived from this conversation. The first, from lines 6 to 10, exemplifies a case of non-understanding attributed to the speaker’s confusing and faulty sentence structure. The second and third segments, from lines 13 to 20 and lines 22 to 29 respectively, illustrate examples of a prevention strategy employed by the listener to avoid misunderstanding or non-understanding problems.*

1 A Met ((name of agent))↑
2 C Hi ((name of agent)) (.) how are you?
3 A Hi↑ Fine you↑ (0.4)
4 C Ok↑ hhhh (0.9) Uh-hmm (.) I need (0.3) to buy↑ uh (0.8) a hard disk (.) externo (0.4)
5 A Ya
6 C “Not” (0.4) just (0.3) the big one (0.2) which is more cheaper not the one (0.2) small
7 one (.) from the laptop hhh (1.0) do you have any idea how that w’k’n um: much
8 money do I need? (0.4)
9 A Um::: (.) for this (.) you mean the small one or the big one? (.)
10 C The big (.) one (0.3) the big one is (0.2) cheap (0.3) er, right↑ (.)
11 A Ya:: (.)
12 C “Ok” (0.6)
13 A Um:: (0.4) let me give you an (.) indi-cation↑ (.) it might (.) be hhhh (1.1) a little bit
14 less or a little bit more (.) but for instance:: oh one moment (5.9) ((sound of keyboard))
15 hhh (4.3) mm well let’s say::: for a two hundred gee bee for instance↑ it might be one
hundred seventy euros
One hundred seventy
Ya
“For two hundred”
Ya
Quite s’ expensive no (.) cause a year ago was the same price (.)
Ya I dunno (.) but this is e price I just (0.2) check here so might be a little bit less but
(.) maybe:: (0.6)
Ok (.) so I need (0.2) something around two hundred° (0.4)
Ya because if I look at the three hundred (.) it says two hundred forty nine (.)
so::: hhh (0.8)
Two hundred forty nine for three hundred gigabytes° (0.2)
Ya:: (pt) (0.2)
O-K
And::: (0.4)
So it is possible that or I mean if I have money in my budget I can order soon (0.2) to
(0.3) to (0.7) y’r department↑
Ya d’wa do’ja wat’ch do is then:: so just check it (.) to::: (0.7) I don’t know who is
about your budget [Luz::: and your supervisor
I already asked (.) uh Frans if he can give me the, the balance of
my budget ()
Ya [ok
[if i’d money ( ) and then if I have then I (1.0) I con-tact whom [I
Luz because he has to sign all do the:: bee o bee and then if she has sign’d it can do to
( (word inaudible)) so it can be ordered (0.3)
A:: ok (.) so I fill in tis bee o bee(0.2) and then give it through sign (.) and the
[ supervisor] (.) sign
[ ya
ya (0.5)
And then (.) go (0.2) to::: (0.6)
Ya
Uh::: (0.6) uh
To me or Harold v’ry (0.4) any of us [and then
[“to any of you” (.) and then (.) you can just (.) to
me a’ how [long] does it take? hhh (0.7)
[ ya ]
Good question (.) I can ask for it↑ (0.3) Um::: (1.0) ya I don’t know (.) m-me-might be
may be a week? (0.2) or may be more I don’t I don’t know but (.)
Ya° (0.2) we can look (0.6) because also (.) I have a (.) problem with my lap-top now
(0.3)
y
Ya (0.5)
It (.) par-ti-tions like cee and dee (0.4)
Ya (.)
And the (.) cee (0.2) (0.2) is ten gigabytes↑ (0.2)
[ Ya ]
[ And the] (.)
Dee (.) for (.) data is (0.3) thir-ty (0.4)
Ya
It’s now (0.2) from this (0.3) ten (.) which (0.6) eight (.) gigabytes (.) is (.) I don’t (.)
know if (.) if for (1.0) for window ap-pli-ca-tion (.)
Ya (0.3) Ya
More than eight (0.3)
Ya
And (0.2) the (.) and then it’s about (0.3) t’wa (0.5) almost (0.3) around one gigabyte
(0.3) to change or (.) can I change (0.3) like (.) just (0.7) switch (0.5) dee (0.2) to (0.2) cee and (0.2) cee (0.2) to (.) dee like (.) I have (0.2) thir (0.2) ty on (0.4) cee (0.7) like (.) your primary (0.2)

A Ya

C Is it possible? (0.8)

A It's (.) a (.) pro-cess (.) which (0.3) takes:: about one hour↑ (0.4)

C Ya° (0.5)

A A:: um (.) for nine-ty (.) eight (.) percent for sure it will go (.) ok (.) two percent chance it will not go ok (1.4)

C Ok°

A Well (.) I just say this that it's

C [but I don't, I don't lose data(h) if you'll go wrong (0.3)

A If it goes wrong while then it will be (.) come a headache (.) to (.) get your data but (0.5)

C A:: (0.3) [ok] (.) so the, the safest is that I buy an Excel or I put all my (0.5)

A [ya]

C dee drive (0.6) on that (.) one which is data↑ (0.2)

A Ya ju dar is (.) the most recommendable one to make up a least (0.4) I mean (.) I am (0.3) let's (.) say almost sure that it will not go wrong (0.6) but (.) while the thing is that I (.) cannot gua-rantee that (0.3) [so] that's why I'm saying it (.) so (0.6)

C [ya]

C No (.) just (0.3) maybe I just (.) let you do that (.) and then:: (.) to see if I have enough memory (.) so ((the next utterances are not audible))

A ya

C (0.5) [then] I can have the (0.5)

A [ya ] ya (0.4)

C Ok°

A That's the best (.)

C That's the best way° (0.4)

A Ya

C O-K (.)

A Ya↑

C °Ya° (0.2)

A Well

C Thank you very much (.)

A [Ok

C [I'll let you know if (.) can (.) buy (.)

A Ya (.) sure (.)

C °Ok°

A Ok (.) good luck (.)

C Thank you

A Ba-bye

End of Transcription
Segment for Analysis 1

TS  6  C  "Not" (0.4) just (0.3) the big one (0.2) which is more cheaper not the one (0.2) small one (.) from the laptop hhh (1.0) do you have any idea how that wˈkˈn um: much money do I need? (0.4)
TS  7  
TS  8  
OIR  9  A  Um::: (.) for this (.) you mean the small one or the big one? (.)
RE 10  C  The big (.) one (0.3) the big one is (0.2) cheap (0.3) or, right↑ (.)
RA 11  A  Ya::: (.)

TS - Trouble Source  OIR - Other-Initiated Repair  RE - Repair Execution
RA - Repair Acknowledgement

The caller’s utterance in line 6 and 7 is considered to contain a problematic construction of a message, which the agent could have recognized immediately as he positions an other-initiated repair by requesting for clarification. In line 10, the caller acknowledges the invitation for repair by indicating his preferred size for the item, which the agent, in turn, accepts with a ‘ya’ in line 11.

Segment for Analysis 2

UT 13  A  Um::: (0.4) let me give you an (.) indi-cation↑ (.) it might (.) be hhhh (1.1) a little bit less or a little bit more (.) but for instance:: oh one moment (5.9) ((sound of keyboard)) hhh (4.3) mm well letˈs say:: for a two hundred gee bee for instance↑
UT 14  
UT 15  
UT 16  
RFCo 17  C  One hundred seventy
RR 18  A  Ya
RFCo 19  C  "For two hundred°
RR 20  A  Ya

UT - Utterance  RFCo - Request for Confirmation  RR - Response to Request

The agent’s utterance in lines 13 to 16 is a response to the caller’s question about the price of the item under discussion. Upon receiving the needed information from the agent, the caller positions an utterance that appears to be taking the form of a request for confirmation of his understanding of the newly acquired information from the agent – in line 17. The agent responds to the ‘request’ with a ‘ya’ in line 18, which is then followed by the caller’s request for another confirmation in line 19 and the agent’s response in line 20.

Segment for Analysis 3

CU 24  C  Ok (.) so I need (0.2) something around two hundred° (0.4)
SC 25  A  Ya because if I look at the three hundred (.) it says two hundred forty nine (.)
SC 26  
RFCo 27  C  Two hundred forty nine for three hundred gigabytes° (0.2)
RR 28  A  Ya::: (pt) (0.2)

CU – Clarification Utterance  RFCo - Request for Confirmation  RR - Response to Request
SC – Statement of Clarification

The fragment above is a continuation of the prior segment – with the caller asking the agent about the price of a hard disk. In line 24, the caller formulates his understanding of the message which he could have received from the agent in the previous turns – although in this case, there is an implied need for a confirmation from the agent. The agent eventually produces an utterance, in lines 25 and 26, that is intended to respond to the caller’s earlier utterance. It appears that pieces of new information are included in the agent’s previous utterance and this prompts the caller to reconstruct the acquired message, in line 27, for a confirmation of his understanding by the agent.
Telephone Conversation 8

Location: SENTO, Enschede

Situation: A client from Norway happens to dial a helpdesk based in the Netherlands to ask for information about a gaming product from an agent who is Dutch. A segment, from lines 1 to 13, illustrates misunderstanding due to the listener’s erroneous interpretation of the speaker’s utterances.

1. A ((Name of agent)) speaking how I may help in English, please↑ (0.9)
2. C HELLO↑ (0.2)
3. A Hello↑ (0.5)
4. C Ya, e, e:: (.) do you speak Norwegian?
5. A I don’t speak Norwegian I’m sorry (.)
6. C No, it’s no, it’s no problem↓ (.) uh, are you located in Norway or? (0.4)
7. A Um, I’m now located in the Netherlands (0.3)
8. C Ok because, a, a I got [Norwen] and um, uh (0.5)
10. A I [understand(s) but I think the Norwegian agents aren’t available at this moment (0.2)
11. C ]
12. C Oh ok, ok (.) but maybe you can help me or (.)
13. A That’s right
14. C I can, I can ask you, umm, watta ask (.) um wat I was interested was, um the (.) um (.) um:: (0.4) uh (.) products they are they (.) um (.) being promo-ted da (.) is this uh electronic (.) uh shops:: in Norway do you do you have is that uh chain::? (.) which uh is a:: uh selling your products? (1.0)
15. A Um::
16. C After ______ you know you have like a::: _______ but when we call it a, we have ((Norwegian term)) (.) we have different ones (.) Space World we have (1.3) but is that a difficult question for you? (.)
17. A Um::: ya that’s a difficult questions because we don’t have that information which uh, uh shops sells it (1.0)
18. C “No” (0.3)
19. A Which chains (.) sells its (0.3) um::: (2.1) hhhh
20. C Ok but I can, I can chuck with the (.) for example er space world and then e tell me (0.2) they don’t tell uh most likely if they don’t have themself er which, which shops uh (.)
21. A Ya
22. C A let’s hop (0.2) uh but one question uh: for you is uh:: (.) I have ((name of product)) from ((name of brand)) this year, recording of forced feedback (0.2) uh steering wheel (0.4) you know ↑ for Play Station two (0.2)
23. A “Ya” (0.4)
24. C And (.) it’s a:: (.) was pro (0.4)
25. A “Yes” (0.5)
26. C Um:: (.) I, I is that a is that a (.) a product which is very good↑ (1.0) or do you hu ahv a better one since this was from February this year? (2.0)
27. A Um::: (0.7)
28. C D’ I always have to say it’s very good (.) of course he
29. A You asking me tis ((inaudible segment)) I can’t say you, oh no (.)
30. C [as expect to that ]
31. A it’s very bad you don’t (.) stay away from that one
32. C [but is that nice (.) it’s it’s a lot of publicity (0.2) to (.) a a
bunch of it (word inaudible) that uh, it’s a r’s product you will recommend (.) that’s
what you say? (0.4)

A Um: ya (0.7) um nice wheels for a, for the Play Station two (0.4) ya [hu d cam’ly

C that the pro or

the rally station vibration wheel for the Play Station? (1.0)

C Is that new (.) which, which one is the best of dis two? (1.0)

A M’ I haven’t tried (.) both of them (.) so I (.) can’t really say ( ) [which] one

C [but ]

A which one is the best (0.5)

C But the l-last one you mentioned (.) is is that a a a newer product or (.)

A I think it’s a newer product (.) yes sir (0.2)

C W-what did you call that? (.)

A Rally (.) vib-ration (1.9) feed-back (0.8) wheel (1.7)

C Rally vibration feedback wheel (.) let’s me see what your driving force pro is::: (0.8)

C H’ve you got what they point to [the (word inaudible) (.) it’s better↑

A [it’s better (0.4)

C “the driving force pro is better” (0.4)

C Ya, because in hard disk um::: (0.3) you can turn it na dn n-n-nine hundred degrees

hh (0.3) and then it was so stronger vibration moto so (.) it was, er, recommended,

er, very very good one (.)

A Uhum° (0.8)

C But um::

A Ya dn ar-are you (0.2) as understand that nine hundred degrees is only um::: (0.2)

supported (.) by a (0.2) a (0.2) one game (.) at the moment (0.7)

C Ya the the Grand Turismo form

A “Ya” (0.2)

C But what I save i-in this uh news release (.) thank you for for the information

but what I say is that (.) you (.) can lock it hhh (0.5) and to to maximum two

hundred degrees (0.9)

A Ya°

C And and and then you can play, uh, all those uh (0.3) games (.) as well

A Ya it switches automatically to the two hundred uh (0.3) back (.)

C Ya so so so you can use it? (.) for all the

A “Yes” (.)

C [Games

A [Of course (.) it’s not only for the Grand Turismo (.) of course but (0.9) it switches uh

itself to (.) to nine hundred (.) degrees when er when (.) when Grand Turismo (.) is ()

played (0.5)

C Ya (.) but as you said (.) and I thank you for that(t) it’s a (.) ((inaudible)) (.)

A “Ya”

C Uh which is uh:: (.) giving this uh:: (0.2) possibi-ly but (0.2) a::: (0.2) hhhh (0.2)

then I have to buy that one as well↑ (0.4)

A Ya (0.3)

C He (.) hhhh (.) ok thank you very much, th’n happy new year to you

A You’re welcome (.) and (.) a you too, ha, ha

C “Thank you”

A Bye

(startDate) End of Transcription (endDate)
Q1  4  C  Yeah, e, e:::(); do you speak Norwegian?
Q2  5  A  I don’t speak Norwegian I’m sorry (;)
Q3  6  C  No, it’s no, it’s no problems(;); uh, are you located in Norway or? (0.4)
Q4  7  A  Um, I’m now located in the Netherlands (0.3)
Q5  8  C  Ok because, a, a I got [Norwen] and um, uh (0.5)
Q6  9  A  [yes ]

TS  10  A  I [understand(s) but I think the Norwegian agents aren’t available at this moment (0.2)
Q7  11  C  ok
OIR  12  C  Oh ok, ok (;) but maybe you can help me or (;)
RE  13  A  That’s right

UT - Utterance  AC - Acknowledgement  Q - Question
QR - Question Response  TS - Trouble Source  OIR - Other-Initiated Repair
RE - Repair Execution

The agent receives the call by identifying himself and by stating his preferred language for the interaction in line 1. The caller’s loud ‘hello’ in line 2 appears to be an indication of his disorientation at the onset of the talk, although it could also be interpreted as an expression of surprise – that in this case the agent speaks a language different from what he is expecting to be used right at the start of the conversation. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that the caller’s ‘hello’ is an immediate response to the agent’s initial utterance – in an effort to fill in the next turn which is for the caller. In line 3, the agent also delivers a ‘hello’ – possibly to function as a continuer – to invite the caller to start transmitting a more complete utterance, perhaps by identifying himself.

Eventually, in line 4, the caller breaks the exchange of ‘hellos’ by posting an inquiry about the agent’s ability to speak Norwegian – which the agent then responds to, in line 5, by admitting his inability to converse in the said language. In line 6, the caller dismisses the agent’s admission as a non-problem and proceeds to position a second inquiry about the agent’s location. In line 7, the agent states his location, while the caller takes his turn in line 8 by explaining his reason for asking for the agent’s location.

Line 10 is labeled as a troubled source since it appears to be indicating that the agent has misunderstood the caller’s earlier utterances (those related to his questions about the agent’s language and location). The caller opts to assume his turn in line 12 by asking if the agent can help him with his problem.

Telephone Conversation 9

Location: SENTO, Enschede

Situation: This conversation involves a British client and a Dutch agent. The client has a problem accessing the Nero program and he complains about the mismatch between the instructions contain in the manual and what really is happening when trying to start the program. The segment, from line 40 to 46, is an example of a caller failing to understand the implication of the agent’s utterance. The second segment in lines 57 to 66 is another illustration of non-understanding, which could have been caused by the agent’s faulty sentence construction.

1  A  ((Name of agent)) speaking (;) how can I help you?
2  C  Oh good morning(;)(0.2) I don’t know if I’d spoken to you early this morning (;)
3  A  the name is ((name of caller)) um (0.7) ((inaudible word)) case history here I’m
4  A  afraid (;) I had tremendous (0.3) problems in (;) up-dating my uh (0.2) cee dee
5  C  rewriter (0.4)
A  "Um"

C  But um (0.9) ev’rything (0.5) I got everything sorted (.) (laughs) except that
now↑ (0.6) when I go in to: the:: Nero (0.3) um (0.5) icon (0.5)
A  Um (0.3)
C  Er:: (1.1) instead of getting↑ (.) you know the (0.5) N-Nero wizt (0.7)

C  come up↑ (1.0) um:: (0.4) I-I get (1.1) new compilation comes up
A  Um (0.5)
C  As a window (0.7) um::: (0.9) and that doesn’t sort of (0.9) ac-cord (0.5) agree
with what your:: little booklet here tells me if what should come out (0.5) now
I w’s wond’ring (0.5) why this happening you know the, the, the procedures seems
to change (0.6) I’v na have to say I’v got this (0.2) new window when I (0.2) clicked
on that icon (.) [Nero ] icon (0.3) I get this (.) thing new compilation (0.7) and then
A  [uhum]   ya
C  of course and you know (.) I’m just wondering (.) how you know the procedure
now has (0.2) compsch (0.4) um::: starts m’t different (0.6) a diff’rent a different
start point (0.5)
A  Ya what is in anyway in Nero nor-mally spoken Nero always (.) starts-up (.)
the wizard(s) (0.2) but (0.2) you can disable that wizard (0.4) and then it will (.)
start up (.) with (0.3) the one that (.) you see on the screen right now (0.4) so with
(0.2) the com-pilation (0.4)
C  How did I come to:: a:: um::: (0.8) delete (.) the wizard then↑ (.) be-cause I didn’t
do it knowingly (0.6)
A  Um:: ya normally (.) spoken any wizard that (.) the (.) bottom right (.) corner there is
a (0.2) tick box (0.5) um::: (.) for disabling the wizard (.)
C  Really↑ (.) I haven’t touched that (0.3)
A  ya
C  I have (.) to ch, to look on:: a:: (test (0.2) system:: (.) now (.) to en-able this again
(0.5)
A  You got one moment (.) for me (0.2)
C  Ya (.) ((inaudible word)) thank you (.)
A  °Thank you°
A  (6.0) Ok so, thank you for waiting (0.4)
A  E, hello there (0.2)
A  Ok (.) when you go (.) to (0.2) start (.) and then to (0.3) pro-grams::: um you should
see Nero in there (1.2)
C  °Go to start° (1.7) and °to° (.) pro Nero (.) smart (.) start:: like start (0.2) smart
(inaudible word) (.)
A  And that (.) that’s (0.3) the one to (.) start please (1.3)
C  So I (0.4) click on that? (0.3)
A  Yes (0.2) please (2.4)
C  Oh (.) it (.) says (.) some (.) files are miss::ing (0.2) please rein-stall Nero (1.0)
A  °Ok what° (0.6) um::: the version of Nero that’s (.) the one for you::: received (0.4)
9a:: (0.2) [oh
C  [well no, th’s actually this is the different one, actually what’s (.) happen (.)
here um::: (0.4) I won’t goin into whole (.) story but in (.) fact I downloaded (0.4) on
your on the recommendation of one of your colleague I downloaded (0.6) um::: (0.5)
a pro-gram from Nero (0.5) a::: (0.7) pre-vious-ly (0.3) to bind:: (0.3) this (0.2) um:::
new (0.4)
rewrite::ter (0.3)
A  Yes° (0.5)
C  So this (.) is a (.) different (0.2) programs::: to one that (0.2) came with du::: (0.2)
soft-ware with the::: uh rewriter (0.2)
A  °Ya° (1.1) ok w-well what’s the writer that you have now, is it a de bee de writer or
You're trying to use the Nero Smart Start, but it's not starting. You might have configured it incorrectly. Let me check the Nero Smart Start manual and see if there are any specific steps you need to follow. If you've done that already, I might need to look at the Nero installation logs to see if there are any errors that could be causing the problem.
do that now while you’re on (0.3)
N’ya it doesn’t matter (0.2) from: best thing what you can (.) do is (0.2) just (0.2) to
later on (.) do it later on (.) cause in the meantime I can an’ other customers (0.5) but
the best (.) thing what you can do (0.2) first (0.5) is (.) to unin()stall the (.) pro-gram
() so (.) first (.) of (.) all the Nero (.) Burning Rome the version five (0.9) nayn as well
look (.) in (.) the control panel at add remove (.) program (0.7) to see (.) if you (.) you
see (.) the Nero (.) smart (.) start (1.5) and if it’s in there (.) delete it as (.) well (.) so
remove it as well (0.8) and when (.) that is (.) un reboot your sys-tem and start up (.)
the (.) install () from (.) the install ()
Can I just (.) do this (.) while you’re on um:: I’m going t’do it (.) quick (.) quick (.) c’d
ju (.) say con-trol (.) panel? (0.2)
On (.) con-trol (.) panel n’ then add (.) remove (0.2) pro-grams (0.2) yes” (0.6)
And then loo-king the (.) pro-gram:: (0.2) and the:: (1.3)
[Uh::]
[Ya ] add (.) remove (.) pro-gram (0.2) that’s (0.2) one (0.9) ((as if whispering)) (0.6)
Which one? (0.3)
Add (.) remove (0.2) pro-gram” (0.3)
Add n’ remove (.) program (.) ya↑ (3.9) um::: (1.1) ø-k::: now↑ (0.6) what do I
highlight(s) (.) on’s it (0.2) ply’d (1.1) a-um::: (0.3)
“There” (.) should (.) be one (.) c’ld (.) Burnin Rome and:: the Nero (.) Smart (.)
should (.) be in there (.) as well (.)
I’ve (.) got (here Nero (.) Burning Rome and Nero’s (.) Six::: (0.2) Demo:: (0.5) and
the Nero (.) Burnin Rome (0.5) those two (.) programs the (.) to remove: ↑
(0.6)
To remove↓ (0.4)
“Ya” (0.2) a:nd aft’r then (.) that (.) you remove (.) then res(,)start your sys:: (.) tem n’
then (.) start up (.) this installation (.) from from the installation (0.6) “cee dee” (0.7)
I (.) say” (1.3) the only (.) thing is (.) I think (.) that (1.6) “um:::” (2.2) I don we h’b
we have the win (0.3) icon windows yet (.) ok::: then (0.4) or I (.) pul a (0.2) I’ll do that
then uh::: (0.4) you wan, uh, you want (.) stay on online or? (0.7)
Nah, if’r you arv and any unordered problems (.) um:: with (.) the program just ()
call us (.) again (0.5) n’ then we will help (.) you (0.2) “fur-ther” (0.3)
Ok (.) thank (.) you (.)”ya”
Ya↑ (0.2) “ok” (.) you’re wel-come (.) sir (.)
O-k (.) bye
Bye

***End of Transcription***

Segment for Analysis 1

| UT | 40 | A | Ok (.) when you go (.) to (0.2) start (.) and then to (0.3) pro-grams:: um you should see Nero in there (1.2) |
| AC | 41 | C | “Go to start” (1.7) and “to” (.) pro Nero (.) smart (.) start::: like start (0.2) smart ((inaudible word)) (.) |
| TS | 44 | A | And that (.) that’s (0.3) the one to (.) start please (1.3) |
| RFCI | 45 | C | So I (0.4) click on that? (0.3) |
| RE | 46 | A | Yes (0.2) please (2.4) |

UT - Utterance AC - Acknowledgement TS - Trouble Source
RFCI - Request for Clarification RE - Repair Execution

95
Lines 40 and 41 contain an instructive utterance from the agent, which the caller acknowledges by repeating portions of the previous utterance, in lines 42 and 43, – a form of think-aloud, probably the caller’s strategy to correctly processed the received information while he is also executing an action. The inaudible word in line 43 must have been an important term which triggered the agent to produce a second instructive utterance in this case – in this case, however, he avoids severing the ‘face’ of the caller by giving the instruction politely by using ‘please’. It appears that the caller is not certain about the agent’s second instruction, thus he deploys a request for clarification in line 45, which the agent immediately attends to with a ‘yes, please’ response in line 46.

**Segment for Analysis 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UT 1</th>
<th>57</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>So this () is a () different (0.2) programs:: to one that (0.2) came with du:: (0.2) soft-ware with the::: uh rewriter (0.2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>&quot;Ya&quot; (1.1) ok w-well what's the writer that you have now, is it a dee vee dee writer or a cee dee writer? (1.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT 2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>It's () cee dee rewriter (0.6) &quot;if I have now&quot; (1.3) it's () the um::: (1.1) five two three two key (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>&quot;Ah ok&quot; (2.1) um::: so the Nero Smart Start, ted doesn't start up because (0.3) it's telling you that there some parts are missin (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIR</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Sorry I didn't get that (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>So the Nero: smart (0.2) start (0.3) e won't () start up () be-cause some () parts are missin:::g? (0.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**UT - Utterance**

**AC - Acknowledgement**

**TS - Trouble Source**

**OIR - Other-Initiated Repair**

**RE - Repair Execution**

The consultation between the agent and the caller proceeds without disruption from lines 57 to 62, until the agent’s utterance in lines 63 and 64. The caller displays his failure to catch and process the agent’s question, thus he admits his inability to make sense of the agent’s statement – eventually becoming an other-initiated repair, which spurs the agent to execute the necessary repair in lines 66 and 67.

**Telephone Conversation 10**

**Location :** Sento, Enschede

**Situation :** In this conversation, the nationalities of the caller and the agent are not known. The problem, however, is the client’s difficulty in formatting the hard drive of his computer. From lines 6 to 17, the discussion centers on the agent as he explains the nature of his problem to the agent. This particular segment presents a case of the caller’s failure to understand the question of the agent. The conversation proceeds until reaching the second segment for analysis from this entire talk - and from lines 40 to 49 what is shown is an instance of the caller not understanding the agent for the second time around. The occurrence of misunderstanding within the conversation is contained in the third segment from lines 49 to 57.

1 A Good mor (1.0) this is () ((name of agent)) () spea-king how can I help () you? (0.7)
2 C HELLO () I've () got () it's ((name of product)) () three:: hundred (0.2)
3 A Ya
4 C And I () plugged it up my hard () drive ()
5 A Ya

96
I've five weeks for-matting it (0.3) and::: it (0.4) re-formatted () then::: and () gee ef
es' can' n' vious·ly of course recognize it (0.2)
A Ya↑ () hhh ()
C So I tried reformat·ting n' fa' very ()eer
A Ya↑ (0.2)
C And: () it comes up with the volumes () too (0.2) big () w((laughs))att () do° ()
I: did? (0.4)
A Um::: what () firmware version is running on this () sys·tem? (0.3)
C Sorry? ()
A What° (0.2) firmware () [version] is run[ning]
C [ um:::] [two ] point knot (0.5) four I think° () the
latest one ()
A Then you should () have an int·ernal () format·ting () op·tion↑ (0.4)
C Let::s (0.2) check (0.2)
A Can I um::: () take () down your () tele·phone num·bers re().frence number ()
please↑ (0.2)
C Ya::: we'll my mobile's for·bid () best one () t' con·[tact] (inaudible word) which ()
[ ok ]
A Nine↓ () and your last name? (0.5) ok (2.3)
A And::: the:· unit it·sel () which is () the () three twenty () for·ty or eight::ty↑ (0.3)
C Three::: () for.(jty° ()
A Thir·tre () for·ty↑ (0.8) o(0.3)k::: (0.2) let's (0.4) check:k (0.6) you have a windows
(0) ex(0.3)pee () sys.[]tem::::]
C [ya  ] (1.2)
A Now the unit is () not () um (0.4) wor·king (0.2) anymore↓ (0.9) w'l ok (0.3)
um::: () cud () you () go () to () the:· (0.6) sys·tem:· (0.5) set(.)tings (0.2)? (0.2)
A On the unit () it () self () so not () [connect·[ting] to the [com·pu::ter]
C Ya [ set ] [ up ] [ ya ]
A [Ya  ]
C [Swis::] from (0.9)
A The (0.5) there is () a hidden:: (0.3) feature (0.4) a formatting feature (0.2)
C Ah
A When there is (0.3) a () fur·rur version () two or higher↑ ()
C Ya (0.4)
A So when that is there↑ (0.4) let's::: (0.3) check (0.2) the issues right here (1.1) where
are::: we? (3.9) this () formatting formatting formatting (1.6) is y'r own sys·tem set-
up↑ () um::: if you () press the () of () three but·ton which is () the:: right (0.9)
but·ton (0.2) under the navi·ga·tor but·ton↑ (0.4) or tha'd um::: () top (0.3) down (0.6)
but·ton↑
C N· which are the () but·ton?
A The lowest () but·ton↓ (0.2)
C Ok the () [the]
A [ on ] the front
C Um·rya the last one I () press it (1.1) nothing is ''hap·pen·ing'' (0.6)
A In () sys·tem↑ (0.7)
C Ya (0.2) in sys·tem° (0.2)
A If () you () press () this () of (0.2) three but·tons:: so-called so so lowest but·ton
C [ya ]
C A' k' ment, for hard disk
A Ya ok that's the one↓ so now you can select () that one (0.4)
A And for·mat the hard·drive () of () course ()
C "Can try a send" do you want to format () yes?
A [E·yes::]
C ['Press it'] (0.2)
Then it will ( ) format it'd its ( ) own ( ) um:: (0.3) file alloc-ation sys-tem (0.4)

[that] sh'd:: work ( ) af-[towards]

[ya ] [trans卉 ( ] (0.2)

You are a good ( ) person↓ ( )

((laughs))

Thank you very much

Y'r welcome sir(s)

Bye ( )

Bye

✦✦✦ End of Transcription ✦✦✦✦

Segment for Analysis 1

UT 1 6 C I'v five weeks for-matting it (0.3) and:: it (0.4) reformat( ed ( ) then:: and ( ) gee ef
es can' n' vious-ly of course recognize it (0.2)

AC 1 7 A Ya↑ ( ) hhh ( )

UT 2 8 C So I tried reformat-ting n' fa' very ( ) teer

AC 2 9 A Ya↑ (0.2)

UT 3 10 C And:: ( ) it comes up with the volumes ( ) too (0.2) big ( ) w((laughs))alt ( ) do° ( )

I:: did? (0.4)

RFAI / TS 11 A Um::: what ( ) firmware version is running on this ( ) sys-tem? (0.3)

OIR 12 A Sorry? ( )

RE 13 C What° (0.2) firmware ( ) [version] is run[ning]

RA 14 C [ um:: ] [two ] point knot (0.5) four I think° ( ) the
latest one ( )

LIT – Utterance AC – Acknowledgement RFAI – Request for Additional Information

OIR – Other-Initiated Repair RE – Repair Execution

RA – Repair Acknowledgement

Just like the last segment in the previous transcription, the consultation between the agent and the caller proceeds smoothly from lines 6 to 12, until the problematic utterance from the agent in line 13. The caller takes his turn in line 14 to express his failure in processing the agent’s question – thus the ‘sorry’ eventually takes the function of an other-initiated repair, further providing the agent with the opportunity to repair his previous utterance through repetition. The caller’s utterance in lines 16 and 17 is both his acknowledgement of the agent’s repairing act and his response to the question.

Segment for Analysis 2

TS 40 A So when that is there↑ (0.4) let's:: (0.3) check (0.2) the issues right here (1.1) where
are:: we? (3.9) this ( ) formatting formatting formatting (1.6) is y'r own sys-tem
set-up↑ ( ) um::: if you ( ) press the ( ) ef ( ) three but-ton whic:h is ( ) the: right
(0.9) but-ton (0.2) under the navi-ga-tor but-ton↑ (0.4) or tha'd um::: ( ) top (0.3)
down (0.6) but-tions↑

OIR 41 1 C N, which are the ( ) but-ton?

RE 42 1 A The lowest ( ) but-ton↓ (0.2)

OIR 2 43 C Ok the ( ) [the]

RE 44 2 A [on ] the front

TS – Trouble Source OIR- Other-Initiated Repair RE – Repair Execution

The agent’s utterance in lines 40 to 44 may have been so troublesome because it triggers the caller to ask for a specification of the button, in line 45, – this again performs the role of an other-initiated repair. The agent responds to the invitation for a repair by specifying the button, in line 46. However, as implied in line 47, the caller appears to have failed in identifying the specified
button, as he also is unable to finish his attempt to articulate his understanding of the acquired information (Ok the (.) the). This instance causes the agent to provide a further description of the button for the caller’s ease in identification – in line 48.

**Segment for Analysis 3**

| TS 1 | 49 | C | Um-n’ya the last one I (.) press it (1.1) nothing is “hap-pening" (0.6) |
| OIR 1 | 50 | A | In (.) sys-tem\(\uparrow\) (0.7) |
| TS 2 | 51 | C | Ya (0.2) "in sys-tem" (0.2) |
| OIR 2 | 52 | A | If (.) you (.) press (.) this (.) ef (0.2) three but-ton: so-called so so lowest but-[ton] |
| 53 | C | |
| RE | 54 | C | A’ k’ ment, for hard disk |
| RA 1 | 55 | A | Ya ok that’s the one\(\uparrow\) so now you can select (.) that one (0.4) |
| RA 2 | 56 | A | And for-mat the hard-drive (.) of (.) course (.) |
| UT | 57 | C | "Can try a send\(\uparrow\) do you want to format (.) yes? |

When the caller claims in line 49 that nothing has happened after pressing a button, the agent is pushed to ask for a clarification, in line 50, whether the caller really means that nothing has happened in the system. The caller asserts his previous claim, in line 51, which again spurs the agent to ask if the caller has really pressed the correct button – in lines 52 and 53. The caller responds with a ‘ya’ – again an attempt to assert his previous claim; however he changes his statement in line 54, which appears to be his admission that his previous claims were wrong and that he is mistaken. So the conversation advances with the agent positioning an instruction, in lines 55 and 56, that the caller should press the button that he has correctly identified.

**Telephone Conversation 11**

Location : SENTO, Enschede

**Situation** : A client from Sweden contacts a helpdesk in the Netherlands to complain about his problematic flat screen monitor. The agent assures the client that his monitor will be swapped, although the date for the swapping is not yet known. For segments for analysis are taken from this entire conversation. The first, from lines 42 to 45, is an example of a non-understanding caused by the speaker’s lexical choice; while the second, from lines 102 to 106, also presents another case of non-understanding. The third and the fourth segments, from lines 121 to 128 and from 133 to 143, respectively, are used to discuss cases of misunderstanding and preventative actions.

| 1 | A | Um:: uh ((name of agent)) help you\(\uparrow\) (0.5) |
| 2 | C | Yes (.) please (0.5) my name is (.) Fley Fel-ton (0.5) |
| 3 | A | Yes (.) sir\(\uparrow\) (0.3) |
| 4 | C | This (.) is (.) in (0.2) Swe-den (0.4) |
| 5 | A | Uh::: I (.) can (.) see that here on the dis-play (.) |
| 6 | C | Is it? (.) |
| 7 | A | That y’r (.) phoning from (.) Swe-den (0.3) |
| 8 | C | Ya (0.7) |
| 9 | A | And wad’abab (.) would (.) you like (.) to know? (0.3) |
| 10 | C | Ya I have a (.) problem I have uh::: (0.3) what (.) chu (.) call “it” (0.2) flat (0.3) |
| 11 | | screen::: (0.3) |
12  A  You h've a (.) flat (0.2) screen↑ (0.2)
13  C  Ya:: (0.3)
14  C  J'a wan hun-dred° (.) seven-ty:: (.) uh (0.5) four:: (0.4)
15  A  One (.) seven q (0.4) sugar (.) four↑ (0.2)
16  C  °Ya° (.)
17  A  And then another o-one or (.) two let-ters↑(0.4) and then::: (0.2) a slash::: (0.8) and
18  then (.) di a::: (.) git (.) sc a (.) and then::: (0.2) even-tually (.) another (0.2) let-ter↓
19  (0.3)
20  C  °Uhu-ya° (0.3)
21  A  [And] that is on the (.) back (.) o::f (.) your moni-tor↓ (0.4)
22  C  ["Ya"]
23  C  O-k I::: (.) °ok° (.)
24  A  I would like to have (.) the (0.2) full m-model number (0.6) [please] ↑
25  C  [ya ]
26  C  Ok here it (.) goes (0.3) here (.) it comes (0.3)
27  A  Yes↑ (0.3)
28  C  One (.) seven (.) sero:: (0.2)
29  A  One (.) seven (.) zero (0.4)
30  C  Su-gar (.) four (.)
31  A  Su-gar (.) four↑ (0.8)
32  C  E (.) Fred-ric (0.7)
33  A  Yes↑ (0.4)
34  C  Grand::mo-ther (0.2)
35  A  Grand (.) vry (.) very good
36  C  ((laughs)) (.)
37  A  ((laughs)) (.) ((laughter continues)) (0.6)
38  C  °Slash° (0.4)
39  A  Slash::↑ (1.1)
40  C  Sero (.) sero (0.3)
41  A  Zero (.) zero (0.5)
42  C  Zet (0.5)
43  A  Zet↓ (0.9) °um° (.) ok n' what is wrong with (.) the (.) moni-tor? (0.5)
44  C  °It's° (0.3) dead↓ (0.6)
45  A  Dead↑ (0.4)
46  C  °Ya° (1.7) it's° (0.4) not (0.3) d' open-ning (0.4)
47  A  °Ok° (.) ok (.) may I have your phone num-ber (.) in (.) Swe-den (.) please↓ (0.6)
48  C  Uh::: (0.8)
49  A  And your sur-name (.) your family name is↑ (0.5)
50  C  My (.)'s sur-name is° (0.2) du (0.4) Leif↑ (0.4) el (0.3) ee (0.2) ay:: (0.2) ef (1.0)
51  A  El ee ay ef↓ (0.4)
52  C  °Um° (0.7)
53  A  Ok:: (0.4) [and how we
54  C  ((utterance is not audible))(0.7)
55  A  A (.) pri-va-te (.) o (.) company↑ (0.9)
56  C  Oh this is (.) com-pany↓ (0.4)
57  A  And the (.) com-pa name is↑ (0.9)
58  C  Or ((this portion has been erased from the recording)) (0.2)
59  A  Orap (0.8)
60  C  °Um° (0.2)
61  A  And the str:::eet name is↑ (0.6) °please° (.) spell it (0.4)
62  C  °Oh my° gyad (0.2)
63  A  [Ya]
64  C  [Ya] (1.3)
65  C  Fred·ric (0.5)
Harry (1.0)

A

Eric Nic-loff (0.4)

C

°Yup° (0.3)

A

Say again (.) and a which: number? (1.0)

C

Six° (0.8)

A

Number (.) six↓ (0.5) and the: (0.3) post-al (.) code is↑ (0.7)

C

Six° (.) five (0.2) three (0.3)

A

Six (.) five (.) three↑ (0.4)

C

Five (.) sero° (0.4)

A

Five zero↓ (1.8) tee of a::: (1.0)

C

((laughs)) (0.7) tric

A

Trics (0.3) very good (0.5)

C

Ad(jum::: (0.2) David (0.8)

A

And (.) then:: (.) uh::::: (0.7) ya-dora (0.5)

C

°David° ya ()

A

David↓ (.) o-k (.) very good↓ (0.5)

C

°Um≥ (5.1)

A

°Ok° (0.4) I ha n’ yr’ dealer or a you a end user? (0.6)

C

°User° ()

A

End user↓ (0.2)

A

°Ok° (1.4) and then (.) el (0.3) cee dee moni-tor (1.0) and then a one (.) seven o↑ (1.0)

A

that is sugar (0.4) four (0.4) Frederic (0.6) Gus-tat:: (0.4) slash (.) zero zero zed (0.9)

C

ok (3.6)

A

°Ya° (0.3)

C

°No° dis-play (1.1)

A

Uh (.) er-y-you wt have (0.4) a (.) press (.) on the au-to but-ton (0.8)

A

°You° (.) press (.) the (.) auto but-ton↑ (0.3)

C

Ya (.) and (.) then it (0.3) comes (.) up (1.6) o (.) es (0.3) dee (0.5)

A

O es (.) dee↓ (0.2) [yes]↑

C

[ya ] (0.3)

A

On (.) screen dis-play↓ (0.6)

C

°Ya° (0.4)

A

Yes↑ (0.8)

A

But (0.4) further (0.2) you (.) cannot (.) get (0.2) any (.) pic-ture (.) at all (.) from your windows (0.2) uh::::: (0.3) of (.) your (.) pee (.) cee↑ (0.3)

C

°No° ()

A

°No° (0.2) o-k (.) may I have this (0.4) serial number (.) of (.) this (.) moni-tor ()

A

please (1.5)

C

°Serial num-ber° (0.3)

A

That’s (.) also (.) on the back

C

°Yew::(“) °yup° (0.5) °ok° (3.0)

A

Harry (0.3) David (3.7) sero (0.2) sero (0.2) sero↑ (0.2)

A

Yes (0.6)

C

Four (.) sero (0.3)

A

Four (.) zero (1.0)

C

Two (0.3) sero (.) sero (0.3)

A

Two (.) zero (.) zero (0.6)

C

Seven (.) seven (0.3)

A

Seven (.) seven↑ (0.3)

C

One (.) one↓ ()

A

One (.) one↓ (1.1)

A

And the (.) date (.) of (0.2) pur-chase (0.3) of (.) this (.) moni-tor is ↑ (0.9)

C

Oohu::: (.) hu (.) ohu (.) let’s see it (0.2) it (0.2) was it in(0.7)
A  Please () check () on your invoice (1.5)

C  “I don’t h’v it” (0.8)

A  Then I leave it (0.2) ah () op-en† (0.2) as () it® (.) is † (0.7) please (0.3) give
(0.2) only moni-tor (0.3) in () foot (0.5) no () cable (0.5) whatever () cable () can be
(.) taken:: off (0.3) please (0.2) take () it () off [from] the moni-tor↓
[now ] † (0.5)

C  Now † (0.3)

A  E’ you don’t need () to do now:: but () in a () couple () of () days () when ()
come () and () swap () the moni-tor (0.5) at () your () place↓ (0.5)

C  E ya:: ok (0.3)

A  Yes† (1.1) uh:::: (.) and then::: (0.3) I have a moni-tor () for you† (0.3) so (.)

d’ ba () can (0.2) swap (0.7) if but () will it () that () th’t w’ll () be () tom-morrow
of (0.2) or af-ter Christ-mas (0.2) I () cannot () tell (0.5) “but” () most () probably
(0.2) af-ter Christmas® (0.3)

C  Ya (0.3) mm (.)

A  And I have () a::: () reference number () for you† (0.3) that () is (0.8) pap-pap
(0.2) four (1.0)

C  “One moment” (0.3)

A  Yes†

C  (9.2) ((saying the phrase ‘reference number’ like a whisper)) and () that’s is for the
swapping† (0.5)

A  Ya that is () for the () swap-ping↓ (0.2) yes:: (1.0)

A  Pap-pap () four (1.3)

C  What? (0.7)

A  “And® () that is (0.3) the number (0.2)

A  Pap-a:: (0.4) four (1.0)

C  Pee (.) four (0.3) ↓

A  Pee () four↑ (0.4)

A  Twenty () three (0.2) twelve (2.1)

C  “Um”® (0.5)

A  And then () o () four (0.2) one nine↓ (0.7)

C  Four () one () nine® (0.4)

A  Yes (0.9)

C  Do you know what () com-pany () will swap it () it? (0.3)

A  No () sir I have (.) no idea be-cause (0.2) the:: um:: now:: ye () doing Sweden†
(0.5) and:: c:: (0.2) uh::: more than::: uh (0.2) well® () only on:: ce in a blue moon:::
and:::

C  (laughsi)

A  And I () do not know (0.6) the ex-xact (0.2) a::: () swap-ping date (0.2) and we have ()
“the® holi-day () is now in () front of us (0.6) so:: (0.2) uh, uh (0.2) can () take a little
() longer than usual↓ (0.5)

C  “Ya”® (0.4)

A  Ya

C  At they’r (0.5) we () can’t () say like () tis () a (0.4) there is () a () comp-any
(.) by who:::. (0.3)

A  Who () swap the moni-tor for us (0.3) that is () cor-rect (0.3) but uh only () do
not () know when ex-actly () ly () be-cause (0.6) this () also the:: um::: () holi-days
(0.2) now (.) co-ming (0.3)

C  Ya, ya () “ya”® (0.2)

A  Yes†

C  What I was () thin-king of () this is () one () com-pany here in () town (0.4)

A  That is () pos-si-ble () but () I have no i-dea () sir↓ (0.2) be-cause usually I’m not
(0.2) is ugh () working on () Sweden (0.5)

C  uhu
Ah (.) ok↓ (.)
Am only wor-king on the English um mar-ket and on the German market:: (0.4)
Hm ok (0.3)
Yes↑ (0.4)
"Tah" (1.0)
OK () sir () but () it () will be swapped (0.4) if it () takes () too long then () please
ring again↓ (0.8)
Ya (0.4)
O-k
It’s a little bit ur-gent be-cause () I need it () all the () time
Ya (0.2) but (0.4) problem is (0.1) now we () have the holiday () s coming↑
Ya, ya no what I mean if () it’s () on Monday () or () something
I have no idea::: (.) [sir
um (0.3)
It () can () take a little bit () long:::er ()
"Uhuh" (0.9)
Ok (0.2)
Ok () sir (0.7)
Thank () you (0.3)
Y’r wel-come (0.6)
Bye (0.2)
Bye

End of Transcription

Segment for Analysis 1

Q 42 A  Ze↓ (0.9) "um" () ok n’ what is wrong with () the () moni-tor? (0.5)
QR/TS 43 C  "It’s" (0.5) dead↓ (0.6)
OIR 44 A  Dead↑ (0.4)
RE 45 C  "Ya" (1.7) it’s (0.4) not (0.3) d’ open-ning (0.4)
RA 46 A  "Ok" (.) ok (.) may I have your phone num-ber (.) in (.) Swe-den (.) please↓ (0.6)

Q – Question  OIR – Other-Initiated Repair  RE – Repair Execution
RA – Repair Acknowledgement

When the agent asks the caller to state the problem of his monitor, in line 42, the agent replies by saying that it’s dead, in line 43. The word ‘dead’ appears to have been problematic as the agent just repeats it with a rising tone, in line 44 – possibly indicating his need for explanation of the term from the caller. The caller eventually constructs his definition of the word ‘dead’ in line 45, which the agent then acknowledges in line 46 – thereby resulting to the resumption of the talk after a short lapse.

Segment for Analysis 2

RU/TS 102 A  "No" (0.2) o-k (.) may I have this (0.4) serial number (.) of (.) this (.) moni-tor (.)
please (1.5)
103
OIR 104 C  "Serial num-ber" (0.3)
RE 105 A  That’s () algo (.) on the back
RA 106 C  "Yeow:::(.) "yup" (0.5) "ok" (3.0)

RU – Request Utterance  OIR – Other-Initiated Repair  RE – Repair Execution
RA – Repair Acknowledgment
In line 102, the agent is requesting the caller to give the serial number of his monitor. The caller, in turn, displays his difficulty in making sense of the phrase ‘serial number’, as he only repeats the phrase possibly with a tone of uncertainty – in line 104 – and this could have been interpreted by the agent that the caller has a difficulty identifying the ‘serial number’. Such an interpretation may have prompted the agent to describe the location of the ‘serial number’ in line 105, which the caller immediately recognizes in line 106.

**Segment for Analysis 3**

| TS | 121 | A | Then I leave it (0.2) ah () op-en↑ (0.2) as () it* () is↑ (0.7) please (0.3) give |
|    | 122 | A | (0.2) only moni-tor (0.3) in () foot (0.5) no () cable (0.5) whatever (0.7) cable () can |
|    | 123 | A | be () taken: off (0.3) please (0.2) take () it () off [from] the moni-tor↓ |
| OIR 1 | 124 | A | [ now ]↑ (0.5) |
| OIR 2 | 125 | C | Now↑ (0.3) |
| RE | 126 | A | E’ you don’t need () to do now: but () in a () couple () of () days () when they () |
|    | 127 | C | come () and () swap () the moni-tor (0.5) at () your () place↓ (0.5) |
| RA | 128 | C | E ya: ok (0.3) |

**TS – Trouble Source**

**OIR – Other-Initiated Repair**

**RA – Repair Acknowledgement**

**RE – Repair Execution**

As the agent is instructing the caller what to do, in lines 121 to 123, the caller then grabs his turn, in line 124, to position an inquiry for clarification about the time when he would execute the agent’s instruction. In a possible attempt to get his question attended to, the caller repeated his question in line 125. Here the caller’s question about the time becomes an other-initiated repair – intended to invite the agent to clarify his utterance from lines 121 to 122, as the caller deems it incomplete when the agent has not indicated the time when the caller should perform the instruction. Lines 125 and 126 contain the agent’s execution of a repair by stating the information about the time, thereby answering the caller’s question. The caller eventually acknowledges the repair in line 127.

**Segment for Analysis 4**

| UT | 133 | A | And I have () a: () reference number () for you↑ (0.3) that () is (0.8) pap-pap |
|    | 134 | A | (0.2) four (1.0) |
| RU | 135 | C | "One moment"↑ (0.3) |
| RR | 136 | A | Yes↑ |
| RFCI | 137 | C | (9.2) ((saying the phrase ‘reference number’ like a whisper)) and () that’s is for the |
|    | 138 | A | swapping↑ (0.5) |
| RR | 139 | A | Ya that is () for the () swap-ping↓ (0.2) yes:: (1.0) |
| TS | 140 | A | Pap-pap () four (1.3) |
| OIR | 141 | C | What? (0.7) |
| RE 1 | 142 | A | "And"↑ (0.7) that is (0.3) the number (0.2) |
| RE 2 | 143 | A | Pap-a: (0.4) four (1.0) |
| RA | 144 | C | Pee () four (0.3) ↓ |
| A | 145 | A | Pee () four↑ (0.4) |

**UT – Utterance**

**RU – Request Utterance**

**RR – Response to Request**

**RFCI – Request for Clarification**

**TS – Trouble Source**

**OIR – Other-Initiated Repair**

**RA – Repair Acknowledgement**

**RE – Repair Execution**

**A – Acknowledgement**

The agent is about to give a reference number to the caller, in lines 133 and 134, when the caller interrupts the agent in line 135 – and this may have been necessary for the caller to get a pen and a paper that he can use to take down the reference number. In line 136, the agent gives in to the caller’s request for a momentary break. After a rather long pause, the caller verbalizes his readiness to get the reference number from the agent in lines 137 and 138. In line towards the end of line 137, however, the caller transmits a request for clarification – with an objective of being
affirmed whether his interpretation that the reference number is for the swapping or not. The
agent eventually assumes his turn in line 139 to respond to the caller’s request for clarification –
and in line 140 the agent deems it apt to continue dictating the reference number for the caller.
However, in line 141, the caller again displays his failure to make sense of the agent’s prior
utterance, thereby precipitating the agent, in line 142, to explain that the ‘pap-a four’ is already
part of the complete reference number that the caller should write down. Again the agent repeats
his utterance, located in line 140, in line 143, which the caller immediately understands – as he is
able to associate ‘pap-a four’ with ‘pee four’ in line 144, further eliciting the agent’s confirmation
in line 145.