

Marta Gonzalez-Lloret: Reconstructing NS/NNS communication  
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## Reconstructing NS/NNS communication

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### Abstract

The study of miscommunication between native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) is a recent one, derived mainly from the literature on miscommunication between native speakers, borrowing its terminology and paradigms. Most of the studies focus mainly either on the source of miscommunication or trouble source, or on how the repair process begins, that is who initiates the repair (either the speaker -self-repair initiation- or the listener -other-initiated repair). This study considers two other important steps in a case of miscommunication: the negotiation/repair and the re-establishment of communication. That is, who collaborates in the repair of the miscommunication and how the interaction is reconstructed. A better understanding of the reinstatement process is an essential step for Second Language Learning since sociolinguistic interaction is a vital part of communication. This paper presents eight interactions. Seven of them service encounters, between NS and NNS from a Conversation Analysis (CA) perspective, focusing on what type of misunderstanding or non-understanding occurs, who initiates the repair and how, who actually repairs the miscommunication and how, and how participants continue constructing the interaction after it is repaired.

*“Much learning does not teach understanding”*  
Heraclitus (540BC-480BC)

### Introduction

The study of language interaction between NSs and NNSs focusing on acquisition<sup>1</sup> has been done from several main perspectives: from an SLA perspective, a Discursive theory of SLA, and a social perspective. In the SLA paradigm, studies of interaction between NNSs have looked at the negotiation of meaning that is necessary in order to maintain a conversation, the “collaborative work which speakers undertake to achieve mutual understanding” (Ellis, 1994, p. 260). Most of the studies in the SLA field have focused on how the interlocutors reestablish the conversation after a break using techniques such as clarification requests, corrections, comprehension checks, recasting, and paraphrasing, and negotiation has been found to be central for SLA (Long, 1996; Pica, 1994 for overview; Varonis & Gass, 1985). Second perspective, Discourse Theory has focused on the interaction as the vehicle to learn to communicate. The learner engages in conversation in order to

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<sup>1</sup> There is a great body of research of the interaction between native and non-native speakers that does not focus on the interaction component, such as studies of bilingual interaction, code switching, cross-cultural pragmatics, and intercultural misunderstanding.

learn how to 'do' conversation (Hatch, 1978; Schwartz, 1980). A third perspective considers interaction as a social practice shared by a group, in which a learner needs to acquire the ability to construct, reconstruct, and orient to the "structuring resources of the interacting" (Hall 1993, Ochs, 1991).

Most studies have looked at miscommunication in interaction from different points of view: from a linguistic point of view (Gass and Varonis, 1991; Pica, 1994; White, 1989), from a sociological point of view (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1990), from an intercultural point of view (see Banks et al., 1991 for overview; Hinnenkamp, 1987), from a pragmatic point of view (Gumperz, 1978; Hansell & Ajitotutu, 1982; Trosborg, 1987), and from a more eclectic view (Bremer et al., 1996; Coupland et al., 1991). Many of the studies on interaction have taken as their main subject of study the repairs of miscommunication, since they are the main realization of the miscommunication itself. Nevertheless, not many studies have looked at miscommunication as the premises for building an interaction, moving away from the negative perspective of the phenomenon to a more positive constructivist idea (Bremer et al., 1996; Drummond & Hopper, 1991; Koole & Thijs, 2001; Ochs, 1991).

This paper takes communication breakdown as an integral part of interacting and learning to communicate in a foreign language, focusing mainly on reconstructing interaction as a form of second language acquisition. This approach has implications for the field of foreign language learning and teaching, since the teaching of "communication repair" is largely ignored in language classrooms and teaching materials.

### **What's in a name**

One of the main difficulties for a good understanding of the subject is the difference in terminology that is used across fields and authors to identify the same phenomenon, and the use of the same term for different phenomena. When talking about some problem on the communication flow of an interaction, we find terms such as 'miscommunication' (Gumperz & Tannen, 1979; Milroy, 1984), 'misunderstanding' (Gumperz & Tannen, 1979; White, 1989), 'non-understanding' (Bremer et al., 1996), 'communication break-off' (Gass & Varonis, 1991), 'Communication mix-up' (Tannen, 1975), 'communicative breakdown', and 'trouble' (Hinnenkamp, 1987).

Not only do the lexical terms present problems, miscommunication has been approached from different perspectives of communication with important conceptual divergence. See for example House, Kasper, and Ross (2003) introduction and illustration of different approaches in chapters. In this paper, 'negotiation' will be understood in Wagner's (1996) term, as co-constructed by the participants in each interaction.

Some authors have differentiated between 'non-understandings' (when the listener realizes s/he cannot make sense of what s/he hears either because of linguistic constraints or because the frame of reference in which they need to be understood is not clear), and 'misunderstandings' (when the listener achieves an interpretation which makes sense to her/him, but it was not what the speaker meant) Bremer et al., (1996). Nevertheless, these categories are not absolute, and from the researcher's point of view it is many times difficult to know how much of the utterance the listener has actually understood by looking at the interaction only. Since this paper uses a CA approach that looks at the interaction, and not to the participants' heads, this paper will not consider such a distinction.

## Miscommunication

In any type of interaction, miscommunication can exist due to different social backgrounds, perspectives, etc. In an interaction between NSs and NNSs the possibilities of miscommunication rapidly multiply. This is due to the fact that interlocutors don't share the same language, the same sociocultural rules of discourse, or a shared linguistic, cultural and personal background (Gass & Varonis, 1991; Gumperz & Tannen, 1979; Hinnenkamp, 1987). Nevertheless, the participants in an interaction will do anything they can to repair the miscommunication and continue the interaction. This is especially true in service exchanges such as selling/buying, since both parts have high interest at stake. The buyer wants some type of merchandise or service, while the seller wants the transaction to be successful for economic gain. If the flow of the communication is somehow interrupted, both parts have interests in resolving the situation. In this case the participants most likely will not let important breaks of meaning pass by, unless the break is irreparable, in which case one of the parties will miss their purpose on the interaction, and the interaction will come to an end.

A recent TV commercial for a checking bank-card illustrates this point. Yao Ming, a famous NBA Chinese basketball player, is in a shop in New York. He approaches the counter to pay for a statute of liberty souvenir. The shop assistant is a young girl, in her 20s. Two other employees are there as well as two other young customers (in their 20s). At the end Yogi Berra, a famous baseball player, approaches the counter. VOV corresponds to the voice over of the announcer.

1. Yao: can I write a check?
2. Girl: yo. (.) (pointing at sign behind the counter that says "absolutely no checks")
3. Yao: ↑yao (.)
4. Girl: ↓yo::
5. Yao ↓Yao ((pointing at his name on his jacket))
6. Girl: ((making a sign with hand to another employer)) ↑yo
7. Emp1: yo. ((nodding of head))
8. Yao: can I wrote a check?
9. Emp1: ↑yo:: ((pointing at sign))
10. Yao: ↑yao:: =
11. Emp1: =yo::: ((pointing at sign))
12. Guy1: ((grabbing friends arm and pointing at Yao)) yo,
13. Yao: ((to the young guys)) Yao
14. Guy1: [YO:::
15. Guy2: [YO:::
16. Yao: ((to both guys)) YAO
17. Emp2: ((to Yao)) <yo>,
18. Yao: can I write a check?
19. Emp2: ((tapping on the sign)) <yo.>
20. Yao: [hhhh ((leaving the statute of liberty on the counter and leaving))
21. VOV: <[next time use your ((name of card)) instead of cash it'll get you in out and on with life>  
(Yao leaves the store and Yogi Berra enters)
22. Girl: ((point out at sign)) yo.
23. YB: gi ((with check book in hand to purchase a gigantic baseball ball))
24. Girl: ((shrugging her shoulders))
25. YB: yo(.)gi
26. Girl: ((sight)) ↑yo: ((calling the other employer with a hand movement))  
(transcription by researcher from Visa commercial, aired at Super Bowl 2003)

This example shows an irreparable communication break, which leaves the NNS, Yao, frustrated, and the shop assistant with a sensation of failure (in line 26 she sighs when confronted with the

same conversational situation again). This is actually quite a comical example, but for a NNS learning a language it can be a traumatic experience that would influence her/his motivation for learning the language.

This paper looks at miscommunication between NS/NNS from a co-construction of interaction framework, considering not only linguistic intervening factors but social factors too. A social perspective on language acquisition considers not only the language improvement, but also the process by which learners become culturally competent members of a language community. A constructivist theory defends that participants learn by “constructing” their knowledge, it implies that each member of the interaction brings her/his own expertise, skills and backgrounds to carry the interaction and solve any problems (Wenger, 1998). In an interaction between NNS/NS, the NS is the expert member of the language community at the ‘center’ of the community, while the NNS is new and ‘peripheral’, but still participating (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is through the interaction that the NS will eventually move towards the center of the language community, becoming more linguistically and socially competent. This idea of social participation for cognitive development can be traced back to Vygotsky’s idea of an essential link between social transmission and cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1986).

The purpose of this paper is not the study of the miscommunication process per se, but the way in which NS and NNS interact to rebuild the flow of communication, and how the communication continues after the order is re-established, a point that has never, to my knowledge, being studied before. In order to study the repairs and continuation of communication, we need to look at the miscommunications, why the interaction flow breaks, how the participants try to repair it, many times unsuccessfully, and how the communication is re-established.

### **Types of miscommunication**

Although some authors have proposed that language is not an important factor in miscommunication, stating that ‘purely linguistic competence in terms of command of the language spoken cannot be held responsible for communication trouble’ (Hinnenkamp, 1991, cited in Bremer, 1997, pg. 37), the interaction between NS/NNS is largely affected by the language command of the NNS. For this reason, this paper looks at several types of misunderstandings, both grammatical and sociocultural. From this perspective, Gass & Varonis, (1991) presents miscommunication as both a grammatical and sociocultural phenomenon. For them (as well as Milroy, 1984), miscommunication occurs when there is a mismatch between the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s interpretation. As subcategories of miscommunication, they distinguish *misunderstanding* which implies different semantic analysis by the speaker and hearer (Bremer et al., 1996; House, Kasper, & Ross, 2003), and *incomplete understanding* in which one or both of the participants recognize that there is a problem in the communication. This concept is what Bremer et al. term ‘non-understanding,’ although for Bremer et al. it is the listener that realizes that the communication is not being effective.

At this point, when the participants in the interaction try to solve the problem that has risen, *negotiated communication* occurs, which may result on the solving of the miscommunication or in a total lack of understanding. *Grammatical miscommunication* includes the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and prosodic systems of the languages. Gass and Varonis (1991) present an interesting case in which two Filipino nurses, with L1 Tagalog, were accused of murder, by injecting patients with a drug, based on circumstantial evidence and the nurses’ discrepancies in testimony. A close analysis of the grammatical differences between Tagalog and English show the

difference in verb aspect and tense marking. The example shows the difficulties in the language that the nurses encountered during the interrogation.

1. Q: So are you saying that some time during that time you learned about Pavulon?
  2. A: Yes
  3. Q: And what else did you learn about Pavulon, other than it was given at surgery?
  - 4. A: Are you asking me about what I know about Pavulon in the summer of '75 or what I know about Pavulon at the present time, after hearing all these experts?
  5. Q: What you knew about Pavulon at that time.
  - 6. A: I know a little about Pavulon
  7. Q: What did you know about it?
  - 8. A: I know it is used in anesthesia.
  9. Q: Why? Or, what else do you know about it?
  - 10. A: When I work in ICU, I learn that it's used to patient to relax. It's a muscle relaxant. The patient should be on respirator and it should be ordered by a doctor.
- (from Naylor, 1979, pp. 5106-5107, transcripts; cited in Gass and Varonis, 1991)

Even in a transcription lacking important prosodic information, and probably phonetic accuracy in the defendant's use of language, we can see in line 4 the confusion of the defendant about the tense of the verb employed by the lawyer. This is understandable considering that Tagalog is a language which marks the verbs for a rich system of aspect such as beginning and end of action, but not of tense, which is not marked in the verb. Therefore, for the Filipino nurse 'know' and 'knew' are only distinguishable by the action being terminated, 'knew' would mean 'knew but not any more', more like the English 'had known', 'know' on the other hand means 'still in progress'. After her question on line 4 and the lawyers recast of the past form in line 5, she still does not take on the past form of the verb (line 6), and continues to use the present tense for what it should have been the past tense (line 6, 8 and 10). This is also probably due to the fact that it is not a salient form in this dialogue, since most of the times it is in a question form, in which the past is then marked by the modal 'did' and not the verb itself. All the changes in verb tenses lead the jury to think that her testimony was full of inaccuracies. This is without doubt a tragic example of grammatical miscommunication, and it shows how important linguistic expertise in a court cases can be. *Sociocultural miscommunication* occurs when [the] "NS tends to attribute NNS a knowledge of sociolinguistic rules of interaction based on a demonstration of familiarity with the purely linguistic rules". This type of communication is common when the NNS is highly proficient. An example from Tannen (1975) illustrates this type of miscommunication.

- |                |                                      |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| NS (wife):     | Bob's having a party. Wanna go?      |
| NNS (husband): | OK                                   |
| NS:            | (later) Are you sure you want to go? |
| NNS:           | OK, let's not go. I'm tired anyway.  |
- (From Tannen, 1975, cited in Gass & Varonis, 1991, pg. 131)

In this example the wife, in line 3, uses a direct tone with her husband to not impose the invitation on him, but he interprets it as an indirect way of communicating that she doesn't want to go, and he answers negatively in order to please her, contradicting his first answer and creating a confusing situation for his wife. This situation may not only rise between Ns and proficient NNS but also between NNSs.

When describing misunderstandings we need to consider *what* was not understood and *why* it was not understood, we can usually not talk about one single cause of non-understanding, but a group of factors with more or less impact (Bremer, 1996). It is also important to consider these questions from both a linguistic and a social point of view.

## Types of repair-initiations

According to Hinnenkamp (1987), repair does not equal error correction. A repair guarantees the normal flow of conduct and order in the interaction (Goffman, 1971). Following Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) a 'repair' is a "practice for dealing with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding the talk in conversation (and in other forms of talk-in-interaction, for that matter)" (Schegloff, 2000, pg 207). For them an integral part of repairs is its organization, who initiates the repair and when. They propose that repairs can be initiated by the speaker of the problematic source or 'trouble source' (TS), 'self-initiated repair' or the listener 'other-initiated repair'. Although in their 1977 paper, Schegloff et al. claimed that other-initiated repair usually follows the TS in the next turn ('next turn repair initiations' or 'NTRs'), following research by Wong (2000) which showed that repairs in data between NS and NNS did not always occur in the next turn position. We need to take these results with caution, though, since we don't know to what extent these results apply to other NNS than the Chinese-English speakers in the corpus. More recently, Schegloff (2000) investigated more native speaker data and modified his framework to include cases in which the repair does not occur in such a position. For this paper, I would incorporate Schegloff's (2000) terminology for the analysis of repairs. In addition, I will use the terms 'Repair Success' (RS) to evaluate the 'repair-initiation' attempts. Tzanne (2000), presents a list of the possible repair-initiation strategies, although she refers to them as 'repair attempts'. She presents three groups: the first group includes direct repair-attempts, the second group repairs by hinting, and the third group points out the possibility of avoidance. See Figure 1.

### Direct repair-attempt

- [1] Speaker rebukes hearer in offensive manner
- [2] Speaker starts RA by referring to hearer's inability to understand
- [3] Speaker corrects in form 'Not X, Y' or 'No, Y.'
- [4] Speaker corrects in form 'Y.' (*repetition, reformulation of TS, rephrasing*)
- [5] Speaker corrects as in [4] and elaborates
- [6] Speaker starts RA by accepting responsibility for misunderstanding

### Repair by hinting

- [7] Speaker leaves RA unfinished before correction
- [8] Speaker invites hearer nonverbally to reconsider interpretation
- [9] Speaker offers corrections in indirect way

### Repair-attempt avoidance

- [10] Speaker replaces repair-attempt with apologies
- [11] Speaker avoids addressing the misunderstanding

Figure 1. Repair attempt strategies (Tzanne 2000:200, text in italics added).

In addition to these strategies, this paper will consider 'clarification requests' and 'confirmation checks' [12] as a type of other repair-initiation, since it is produced in a moment in the interaction when non-understanding is present.<sup>2</sup> Examining these moments of communicative difficulty acts as a 'magnifying glass' for analyzing how both parts come to some type of understanding (Bremer et al., 1996).

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<sup>2</sup> Some researchers (Hosada, 2000), don't consider request for confirmation as addressing a type of misunderstanding because they don't really address "problems" in the communication.

Another consideration when looking at the location in which the repair-initiation starts is the idea that the longer the distance between the repair initiation opportunity and the repair-initiation the harder it is to re-establish the communication (Drummond and Hopper, 1991; Hinnenkamp, 2003). Their examples of telephone conversations (between NSs) show that when the repair is initiated by the same speaker (self-initiated repair) it is usually done in the same turn, before the interlocutor speaks, this does not require any type of intervention from the interlocutor, since there is not a real break of communication or need of negotiation. When the problem is pointed out by the hearer (other-initiated repair) right after the TS, it is usually done in the form of a clarification request, confirmation request, restatement with a change of prosody, etc. If the distance is larger than the fourth turn, the clarification needs to be more specific, usually with reference to the TS, and frequently takes to 'stacked repairs'. For a framework that categorizes miscommunications considering the repair that usually follows see Hinnenkamp (2003).

### **Co-constructing the interaction**

Vasseur et al. (1996) propose that although the difficulty of the discourse is an important factor in building an interaction, "it is the attitude and discourse behaviour which often makes the difference.", "the interactions are, we reiterate, jointly constructed." (pg, 92-93). They present the same speaker in different situations and how sometimes she comes out of the interactions frustrated and without having accomplished her goal while other times she manages to carry on a satisfactory exchange. There is a main difference between Vasseur's study and this study in that their study involved minority groups of NNSs from a perspective of relations of power and gatekeeping encounters, while the participants in this study were not in a socially marked position, other than that of being tourists. All except one of the interactions presented here are service interactions, in which the distribution of power is more even. Both client and seller have a stake in the interaction. It is important for the client to be successful to acquire a product and for the seller in order to make a sell and possibly make a client. In spite of social and linguistic differences, buying and selling exchanges are based on some common knowledge of the world. This is an everyday type of exchange with common patterns of interaction, which can probably be followed by the participants, given their common knowledge. It seems that this activity is an optimal setting for the construction of a common "discursive intercultural" (Koole & Thijse, 2001).

As part of the collaborative process of communication, when the NS realizes that s/he is talking to a NNS with low command of the language, s/he usually modifies her/his language, this is known as 'foreign talk'. As part of this modification, the NS may make use of different language strategies, such as language simplification, topicalization of salient elements, repetition, and emphasis (Hinnenkamp 1987; Roberts, 1996). The NS may also revert to previous knowledge of a similar interaction (Bremer & Simonot, 1996) and/or other non-verbal strategies such as body language. This study looks at the data and analyzes if the NSs in each case are using such strategies when communicating with the NNS, and how these contribute to the co-construction of the interaction.

### **Research questions**

To summarize, the main research question this study tries to answer is: How do NS and NNS re-construct service interactions when there is a non-understanding or misunderstanding?

In order to answer this question, four steps during the interaction need to be considered and four questions answered: Q1: How do misunderstandings occur (the type of misunderstanding); Q2: Who attempts to repair the miscommunication and how do they initiate the repair (the type of repair

initiation); Q3: Who repairs the misunderstanding and how is it done (the repair process); and Q4: What happens after the misunderstanding is repaired (the re-building of the interaction).

## **Method**

The data for this study are based on seven conversations between native speakers of Spanish and native speakers of English, learners of Spanish. Six are service exchanges, while one is a private conversation. The L2 Spanish participants were between the ages of 22 and 28 and were part of a study abroad program in Spain. The students can be classified as intermediate students although their conversational abilities are different. The female student has taken more than six Spanish courses at an American University and she is working towards a degree in Spanish. This was her first experience at a Spanish speaking country. The male student has only taken one class but has visited the country regularly to visit family and friends. Although miscommunication can be due to negative stereotypical views of groups (Hewstone & Giles, 1986; cited in Bank et al., 1991), this was not considered one of the possible reasons in these data because both students involved in the interactions did not look like “typical” American students, and their L1 accent when speaking L2 was not easily identifiable.

The conversations varied between 2 minutes and 18 minutes. All the conversations were recorded with a small digital recorder. The students carried the recorder with them and were asked to record their service encounters during several days. The NSs were not aware they were being recorded. Transcription and conventions were adapted from the work of Ten Have (1999). (Translation by the author).

## **Conversational Analysis**

The analysis of the data was done using a Conversational Analysis (CA) approach. There is a growing number of studies in the field of NS/NNS interaction that use a CA approach (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Boden, & Zimmerman, 1991; Wong, 2000), and especially of conversation interactions that are not “casual” conversation but have a purpose and/or are embedded in institutions or daily practices (Firth, 1996).

Conversational Analysis (CA) was adopted for the examination of the data because a detailed analysis of the order of the data helped to find the sources of “trouble”. CA brings to the analysis the notion of ‘intersubjectivity’, how participants in social interaction use resources to achieve understanding and show comprehension of it. The detailed analysis of CA allows to look at the verbal and non-verbal communication used by the participants to make sense of each other and show involvement in the conversation (Roberts, 1996). CA reveals when the participants themselves refer to a problem of communication, which is something imperative for the analysis itself (Wagner, 1996). It also allows to focus on the turns of the interaction which helps to see the non-understanding process. (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Bremer et al., 1996). As Schegloff (1984 cited in Bremer et al. 1996) points out understanding and non-understanding are shown through the ‘responsive treatment’ of the ‘prior turns’ talk’. An added advantage of using CA for this research is that in CA, the analyst is able to make observations in the data in her/his quality of “co-membership” of the participants’ linguistic-cultural community. It is this shared knowledge that allows the analyst to use her/his intuition and recognize “describable” ways of doing things. (Jefferson & Schenkein, 1978, Sacks, 1992, both cited in Firth, 1997). In the case of this research, I shared linguistic and cultural knowledge of all participants involved, since Spanish is my native culture and language, and I have native-like command of the participants L1 language and culture.

One of the pitfalls that have been attributed to CA is that most analysts make distinctions between main and side-sequences, sometimes paying less attention to the second one. Nevertheless, since in interactions between NNS/NS side-sequences tend to be of great importance, portraying the “struggle and pressure” to reach understanding and becoming the focal point of study (Roberts, 1996, pg. 31), in this paper, such side sequences will not be differentiated from the main sequences.

## Data analysis and results

In this section I will present seven data cases. Each case starts with the full interaction followed by its analysis according to the four elements discussed in the Research Questions section.

### Case 1. Next turn repair. The perfect co-structor.

Joe and Fin, both NNS of Spanish, L1 English, go to a shop to develop Advantix film. They need the photos developed soon because they leave for another city at the end of the week. The Shop attendant is a young female Spanish speaker.

- |    |     |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----|-----|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TS | 1.  | Joe- | hola tenemos una película de advantix y es posible:: (.) devlove;;r<br>'hola we have an advantix film and is it possible to (.) retur::'                                                                                                                     |
| SR | 2.  | NS-  | revelarlo!<br>'develope it'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| AK | 3.  | Joe- | revelar:-<br>'develop:-'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|    | 4.  | NS-  | una semana<br>'a week'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|    | 5.  | Joe- | una semana (.) y cuanto cuesta?<br>'a week (.) and how much does it cost?'                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|    | 6.  | NS-  | depende del tamaño que halláis hecho<br>'depends on the size you have made'                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|    | 7.  | Joe- | ok (..) y (..) (hands in the role)                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|    | 8.  | NS-  | son veinticinco (.) pero depe[nde del tamaño,<br>'they are 25 (.) but it depends on the size'                                                                                                                                                                |
|    | 9.  | Joe- | [sí entiendo ok.<br>['yes I understand ok'                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|    | 10. | NS-  | si es así, así o así (.) panorámica ((using hand motion))<br>'if it is like this, or like this, or like this (.) panoramic'                                                                                                                                  |
| TS | 11. | Joe- | es mixto=<br>'it's mixed'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| RS | 12. | NS-  | =mezclado<br>'mixed'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| AK | 13. | Joe- | si so::                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|    | 14. | NS-  | pues no sé (.) más o menos (6s) ponemos diez, diez y cinco? diez normales diez de grupo<br>y cinco panorámicas? más o menos?<br>'dont know (.) more o less (6s) should we say ten, ten and five? Ten normal, ten group and<br>five panoramic? more or less?' |
|    | 15. | NS-  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|    | 16. | Joe- | mas o menos<br>'more or less'<br>(2.5) ((NS is calculating in a calculator))                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|    | 17. | NS-  | unas <u>mil</u> setecientas <u>pesetas</u><br>'about 1700 pesetas'                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|    | 18. | Joe- | ok y ah (.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|    | 19. | NN2- | cuanto eh euros?<br>'how much eh euros?'                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|    | 20. | NS-  | euros? (she goes to a different counter)                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

- 'euros?'  
(6s)
21. Fin- ( ) cause ( )
22. Joe- yea, because we are leaving on friday
23. Fin [yea ya we are living xxx  
(13 s)
24. NS- son diez euros  
'its' ten euros'
25. Joe- vale y ah (.) no es posible mas rápido? (.) [porque::  
'ok and ah(.) is it not possible faster? (.) [because:::]'
26. NS- [podemos pon[er urgente pero::: esataría: (.)
- TS 27. <a principios de la semana que viene>  
[we could write urgent but::: it would be (.)  
<at the beginning of next week'>
28. Joe- ok,
29. NS- sobre el miércoles o jueves de la semana que viene.  
'around Wednesday or Thursday next week'
30. Joe- ok,
31. Joe- either Wednesday or Thursday
32. Fin- ( )
33. Joe- porque uhm vamos a barcelona **en** viernes (.) y (.) necesitamos=  
'cause uhm we are going to barcelona on friday and we need'
34. NS- =las fotos
35. Joe- Sí (.) antes  
'yes before'
36. Joe- so:: ok wednesday or thursday
37. Fin- wednesday is a holiday
- TS 38. Joe- ah, sí (.) wednsday es **un** fiesta  
'ah yes (.) Wednesday is a holiday'
- SR 39. NS- no, la semana que viene!  
'no, next week'
- AK 40. Joe- ohh **el** próximo semana!  
'oh next(masc) week(fem)'
41. NS- eso es  
'That's right'
42. Joe- ah no (.) ok (.) so no es más rápido?  
'ah no (.) ok (.) so it's not faster?'
43. NS- no porque va a barcelona  
'no because it goes to barcelona'
44. Joe- ya! (.) este verd- este viernes (.) a barcelona  
'ya! (.) it's verd- this friday (.) to barcelona'
45. NS- mmm no!
46. Joe- no?
47. Fin- XXX
48. Joe- [mmkey
49. Fin- XXXX
50. Joe- mm right! muchas gracias (giggling softly)  
'thank you very much'
51. NS- de nada, a vosotros!  
'you're welcome, (thank) to you'

TST- Trouble source , M- Misunderstanding , ORI- Other- Repair Initiation, RS- Repair Success, AK- Acknowledge, NVSR- Non-verbal successful repair.

This example shows how smooth an interaction can be when the trouble sources are repaired immediately (next turn repair) (Drummond and Hopper,1991; Schegloff, 1977). In this case we have an extremely cooperative NS, who offers immediate help when the NNS interlocutor starts to show any sign of trouble. The trouble sources never become miscommunication problems, because

the NS resolves them right away. When Joe cannot find the Spanish word for ‘develop’ (line 1), she facilitates it before he can even finish his incorrect guess (line 2). She even clarifies the word *tamaño* (‘size’) (line 8) with hand gestures, in line 10, although there was a claim to comprehension, as expressed by Joe in line 9 (*si entiendo* ‘yes I understand’). Similarly, in line 11, what could have been a potential problem for the communication, a wrong lexical choice, was immediately corrected in line 12 and the correction acknowledged by Joe in line 13. The sequence of lines 38-40 is a little different in the sense that the trouble source is not a lexical problem but a content problem. Joe thinks Wednesday is a holiday and the shop assistant corrects him (line 39) in the next turn. Joe acknowledges the correction, regarding the content as expressed by his intonation and exclamation ‘ohh’, however, he does not pick up on the grammatical form used by the attendant. He uses the article and the adjective on the masculine form although they need to agree with the feminine sustantive *semana* (‘week’). This may be evidence that the NNS is actually focusing on the content and not the linguistic component of the interaction.

In this example the shop assistant plays an important part in the co-construction of the interaction. She is aware of Joe’s language constraints, and although her speed does not slow down, and she does not modify the language structure or use code-switching, she gives support when Joe finds it difficult to finish his utterances. She is practicing what Bremer & Simonot (1996) term ‘taking up an incomplete contribution’. This is the ideal co-structor since she not only offers help with points of difficulty, but she also ‘gives room’ (Bremer & Simonot, 1996) for the NNS to contribute to the interaction. She even advances answers to questions that would have logically been asked in the interaction without waiting for the NNS to formulate the question. In line 4 she answers *una semana* (‘one week’), since the next logical question in the interaction would have been ‘how long does it take?’. We will see that although the NS in all the data cases are very friendly and participatory, not all interactions were so smooth, requiring more effort by both parts.

## Case 2. Pañuelos. A stack of misunderstandings

This case is an example of several linguistic misunderstandings that tried to be resolved by the NNS and the NS without success, the misunderstandings are ‘stacked’ until the first misunderstanding is finally resolved. This interaction is a very illustrative example of both NS and NNS collaborating to co-construct a dialogue, at times very difficult.

Joe and his friend enter a small shop to buy a handkerchief for Joe's friend, all the merchandise is behind the counter. A Spanish woman, about 60, helps them behind the counter. Joe is a NNS male L1 English mid 30s; Frd is his friend, a 60 year old woman L1 English; LDY is the shop lady about 60, L1 Spanish.

	1.	Joe-	hola, buenas [tardes ‘hello, good [evening’
	2.	Ldy-	[buenas tardes [‘good evening’
	3.	Joe	lo siento mi español es un poco malo ‘I’m sorry but my Spanish is a little bad’
	4.	Ldy	ah bueno, va[le= ‘ok, it’s ok’
	5.	Joe	[pero [‘but’
	6.	Ldy	=yo te entiendo, a ver ‘I understand you, let’s see’
TS	7.	Joe	ah okey (.) la mujer eh quiere eh servilletas ‘ah ok (.) the woman eh wants eh napkins’
ORI	8.	Ldy	mantel,

- AK/ M1 9. Joe 'tablecloth',  
mantel. sí  
'tablecloth. yes'
10. Ldy de que tamaño?  
'what size?'
11. Joe i:↑ ah
- ORI1 12. Ldy este? ((showing box with a tablecloth))  
'This one?'
- M2 13. Joe diferente tipos or?  
'different types or?'
14. Ldy i+ aquel le gusta? xxxx  
'yes↑ you like that one?'
- ((she leaves the counter and comes back with a box))
15. Joe no sí ok xxx ((talking to his friend))
16. frd xxxx is mantel?
17. Joe xxx not mantel, hold on
18. frd handkerchief? (0.8)
19. Ldy pequeño o mas grande?  
'small or bigger?'
- ((showing a tablecloth))
20. Joe oh [no no ah (.)]
21. frd [no no ((laughs))]
- SRI2 22. Joe no para mesa↑ pero para cara.  
'no for table↑ but for face'
23. Ldy ahhhhh
24. Joe tiene?  
'do you have?'
25. Ldy servilletas sueltas? °esque eso no es° (. ) esto  
'individual napkins? that really it is not (. ) this'
- ORI2 26. Joe no, no es ah (0.4)
27. Ldy ah! toalla ya se  
'ah! towel I know'
- AK/TS 28. Joe toalla. okey.  
'towel, ok.'
- M3 29. Ldy °a ver de esos de papel? °  
'lets see those paper ones'
- ((pointing at a box))
- OIR3 30. Frn no papel, no papel  
'no paper, no paper'
- SR 31. Ldy ( ) de aquellas ((reaching towards bathing towels))  
'( ) those there'
- SIR 32. Joe no es toalla para cuerpo  
'it's not towel for body'
- OIR 33. Frn no,
- SR 34. Joe es para nariz  
'is for nose'
- AK 35. Ldy ahh!=
36. Joe =si?=  
SR 37. Ldy =pañuelo ((laughing))  
'handkerchief'
- AK 38. Joe ((laughing)) pañuelo okey  
'handkerchief, ok'
39. Frn ((soft laughter))
40. Joe sí.  
((brings boxes with handkerchiefs))
41. Frn o:ke:y::
42. Joe this?
43. Ldy bordadito a mano, muy barato eh  
'hand embroidered, very cheap'

44. Joe °one euro° ((looking at the tag))  
 45. frn one euro  
 46. Joe amarillo (.) y (.) blanco (.3) that's one hundred pesetas (.4) you like this?  
 'yellow (.) and (.) white'  
 47. frn mmhmm. ((nodding))

The interaction starts with Joe introducing himself as a NNS (line 3, 'I am sorry my Spanish is very bad'), that the shop lady acknowledges (line 6), inviting Joe to continue the interaction 'let's see'. In line 7, the first problem arises when Joe asks for *servilletas* ('napkins') and it won't be resolved until line 37, at the end of the interaction, when they all realize that the lexical term he used does not correspond to the item they are looking for (handkerchiefs). Since the lexical term used by Joe is a legitimate item to be purchased in this shop, the misunderstanding takes to a new misunderstanding to a new misunderstanding, and so on, all of them from the trouble source *servilleta* ('napkin'). In line 8, trying to repair the trouble source, the lady proposes a lexical correction to 'napkin', 'tablecloth' since usually napkins are not sold individually (other initiated repair). Joe then acknowledges the correction, in an assertive intonation, creating a new misunderstanding (since they are not looking for a tablecloth). When in line 10 she tries to find information about the size of the tablecloth and Joe is unable to understand, she offers a visual aid, and shows a tablecloth in a box. Joe again creates a new misunderstanding when he asks for 'different types' (line 13) (implying 'something different') what the NS understands as different types of the same element (tablecloth). In the embedded dialogue between Joe and his friend in English (lines 15-18) they start realizing that maybe *mantel* means 'tablecloth' and he himself initiates the repair in line 20, followed by a repair initiated by other, his friend (line 21). The repair includes laughing and several assertive 'no', followed by a statement about the use of the item 'not for the table but for the face'. This new piece of information far from clarifying the misunderstanding, takes it back to the association with the incorrect lexical item *servilleta* ('napkin'). In line 25 the NS still does not know what they want and does not offer an alternative, Joe does not offer an alternative either, but rather a long pause. This is usually a common point of breakage of the interaction or interaction foreclosure. Nevertheless, in line 27 it is the NS who offers another possibility, rebuilding the interaction. She offers *toalla* ('towel') as a possibility, probably associated to Joe's assertive comment in line 22 'for the face'. Joe takes up the lexical item (line 28) and his intonation reveals that this could be the item he is looking for. This misunderstanding is revealed when she offers the word *papel* ('paper') a word Joe's friend knows well (line 30) rapidly volunteering a repair to the misunderstanding, which is successfully repaired in line 31 when the lady reaches towards bathing towels. Although the embedded misunderstanding about being 'paper' has been resolved, the misunderstanding about looking for a 'towel' has not. Both Joe (self-initiated) and his friend (other-initiated) try to repair and finally, in line 34, Joe initiates the repair that will lead to a successful repair in line 37 'handkerchief'. The tension of the interaction is released through the laughter of all participants, the breakdown has been repaired and the interaction continues now as a regular sell/buy encounter. The lady brings out a box of handkerchiefs, Frd chooses several and they pay for them without any more trouble.

This is an interesting example of co-construction which involves hard work from both participants. Both backchannel the other's utterances, and acknowledge when improvement has been done in resolving part of the trouble. The NNS acknowledges the NS's suggestions in line 7, line 9, and line 28 both with an uptake of the lexical item. There is even one instance in which the shop lady acknowledges she is understanding Joe, although the understanding is not real, she still does not know what they actually want: in line 23, her exclamation 'ahhhh' and intonation seemed to indicate she has the answer, but two lines later she is still wandering what he wants ('individual

napkins? that is really not this’). The NNS tries his best to find lexical items to repair the miscommunication and the NS offers opportunities for the NNS to explain himself at the same time that offers support when he lacks the language competence.

### Case 3. Chocolate. A sociocultural misunderstanding

NS is a male with L1 English, and the NNS is a female, L1 Spanish and highly competent in English. The NNS is mumbling a song while they are driving. She tries unsuccessfully to remember the song.

	1.	NS:	what are you mumbling?
	2.	NNS:	that song (0.6) hhhhm. hh. what’s that woman’s name? that singer
TS		(0.2)	
M1	3.		the chocolate woman!
ORI	4.	NS:	areta franklin
M2	5.	NNS:	<u>no</u> :::!! she’s not black!
ORI2	6.	NS:	you said she was <u>black</u> !
	7.	NNS:	no I did not!
	8.	NS:	yes you did!
	9.	NNS:	NO I DIDN’T
TS	10.	NS:	yes you did. you said that <u>chocolate</u> woman.
M3	11.	NNS:	yes, the one that sings that your love is better than chocolate
ORI/M4	12.	NS:	(0.3) sarah maclofn? she’s <u>white</u>
ORI	13.	NNS:	I never said she was <u>black</u> !
	14.	NS:	yes (.) you (.) did
	15.	NNS:	NO <u>I didn’t</u> ((frustrated))
	16.	(3.4)	
	17.	NS:	((laughs))
	18.	NNS:	whats so funny↑ ((quite angry))
RS	19.	NS:	honey, a <u>chocolate</u> woman IS a <u>black</u> woman.
AK	20.	NNS:	oh (0.4) how am I supposed to know <u>that</u> ?

TS- Trouble source, M- Misunderstanding, ORI- Other- Repair Initiation, RS- Repair Success, AK- Acknowledge

In this example the NNS is looking for a name that she cannot remember, as marked by the referential (‘that song’), the pause, and the cut speech, as well as the direct question about the name (‘what’s that woman’s name?’). All she can remember are some words of the song (line 3), this is the trouble source, where the miscommunication initiates. In line 4, the NS offers an answer to the question which triggers a misunderstanding and the following interactional negotiation. Although both NS and NNS are trying to repair the breakdown in the communication, subsequent misinterpretations take them deeper in the break. The NS claims that the NNS is talking about a black woman “chocolate woman” (line 3), nevertheless the NNS has associated “chocolate woman” to the words of a song by a singer which is not black, and which sings a song about chocolate. They both have clear concepts of the pragmatic use of the linguistic item and they defend that this is the one that has been used. This is an example of sociocultural miscommunication due to pragmatic knowledge and to the difference between inferences that participants draw. In this case the speaker of English was applying a semantic scope to the word “chocolate” that was culturally specific and was not shared by the Spanish speaker. The participants try to be repair the misunderstanding several times unsuccessfully, until one of them, the only one that has knowledge of both possible pragmatic uses of the word, realizes the misunderstanding. This interaction is also an example that miscommunication is more frequent, and sometimes “dangerous” in conversations with fluent second language speakers than in those with second language learners (Gass and Varonis, 1991, pg 131).

This interaction exemplifies how complicated a misunderstanding can be, and how the repair and restoration of communication may take several turns, time and collaboration from both parts, and how the lack of repair could take to a total break of the communication (line 16), and possible more serious consequences. We can also see that the repair-initiations come from the “other” person, there are not self-initiated repairs in this interaction, probably because both interlocutors are certain they have produced accurate sentences. In lines 4, 6, and 12, it is the NS who starts a miscommunication turn by interpreting (wrongly) the NNS’s words, and it is the NNS that attempts repair, although unsuccessfully. In line 13, the NNS provokes a new misunderstanding while trying to clarify the previous misunderstanding (M3), and it is the NS who tries without success to initiate repair. The repair is finally successful in line 19, initiated by the NS in line 17 through a non-verbal turn, laughter. The NS restores the communication through an explicit explanation of what the pragmatic meaning of the word ‘chocolate’ is for him, making this shared knowledge. The communication is restored as acknowledged by NNS in line 20, ‘how am I supposed to know that?’. In this turn, the speaker categorizes herself as NNS, legitimizing or even claiming the right to not knowing the meaning of the contested lexical item. This interaction exemplifies the reconstruction of a sociocultural misunderstanding between a NNS / NS.

#### Case 4. At the travel agency

Ann is a NNS of Spanish, L1 English. She is going to a travel agency to book a trip for the weekend to Barcelona for her and three other friends. She takes Joe along. He is also L1 English and his spoken proficiency is not as high as Ann’s, but his listening skills are better, and he had been in Barcelona a few weeks earlier. The travel agent, female, NS of Spanish, is looking at flights but she cannot find a return flight for Sunday.

- |    |     |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----|-----|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | 1.  | NS-  | no hay más que por la mañana ((she keeps looking))<br>‘There is only morning ones’                                                                                                                                                            |
|    | 2.  | Ann- | Si no hay nada <b>por vuelto</b> (.) es posible encontrar algo:: po::r tren?<br>‘If there is nothing for return (.) is it possible to find something by train?’                                                                               |
|    | 3.  | NS-  | por tren no hay nada, porque lo acabo de mirar, ahora mismo, para el regreso                                                                                                                                                                  |
|    | 4.  |      | no hay nada. entonces tendría que ser ehh 0.2) vamos a ver AirEuro:pa: (.2)                                                                                                                                                                   |
|    | 5.  |      | a cientocuarentaiun euros si que tenéis para ir<br>‘There is nothing by train, I have just looked at it, right now, there is nothing to return, then it would have to be ehh (0.2) lets see AirEuro:pa: (.2) at 141 euros you have °one way°’ |
|    | 6.  | Joe- | ((whispering)) find out if there is space from Valladolid to Barcelona=                                                                                                                                                                       |
|    | 7.  | Ann- | ((whispering)) in autobus?<br>‘by bus?’                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|    | 8.  | Joe- | =((whispering)) because what she is saying is that there is no space because                                                                                                                                                                  |
|    | 9.  |      | they only give certain amount for Salamanca                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|    | 10. | Ann- | ((whispering)) ok                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|    | 11. | Joe- | ((whispering)) because then you can take the bus to Valladolid [and jump                                                                                                                                                                      |
|    | 12. | Ann  | ((whispering)) [and then                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|    | 13. | Joe- | ((whispering)) jump in the train there                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|    | 14. | Ann- | ((whispering)) ( )                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|    | 15. | NS-  | pero bueno tengo dos cupos por ser domingo<br>‘There are two places because it is Sunday’                                                                                                                                                     |
|    | 16. | Ann- | y no hay nada por tren (.) aquí en Salamanca ir a:: Barcelona<br>‘And there is nothing by train (.) here in Salamanca to go:: Barcelona’                                                                                                      |
| TS | 17. | NS-  | no hay nada para regresar de Barcelona ni a Madrid ni a Salamanca, en tren, el domingo<br>‘There is nothing to come back from Barcelona to Madrid or Salamanca, by train, on Sunday’                                                          |
|    | 18. | Ann- | y::: es posible: si: es posible ir a Valladolid <b>primer</b> y despue:s ir en po:r tren a: sa a a Barcelona                                                                                                                                  |

- 'And is it possible is possible to go to Valladolid first and then go by train to sa- to Barcelona'
- M 19. NS- es el mismo tren que va allí  
'It is the same train that goes there'
- OIR 20. Ann- [es el mismo (.) hmm  
[ 'it is the same one (.) hmm'
- (0.4)
21. NNS- [es que los fines de semana suele estar bastante complicado, el tren  
[ 'on the weekends it is quite difficult, the train'
22. Ann- °it's strange° ((talking to Joe))
23. Ann- es muy-  
'It's very-'
- ORI 24. Joe- -pero hay una tren (.) desde hm Valladolid (.2)  
'but there is train (.) from hm Valladolid'
25. NS- si  
'yes'
26. Joe- no hm no pasar Madrid, ° si°  
'it does not to pass Madrid °yes°'
- TS 27. NS- creo que si.  
'I think it does'
- M 28. Joe- no (.) es-  
'no (.) is-'
- ORI 29. Ann- el tren- (1.1) ((travel agent looking in the computer))  
'the train (1.1)'
- ORI 30. Joe- porque hace::: (.) tres semanas (.) mi mujer y yo (.) hm venir a Barcelona, de Valladolid, (.) y es un (.) ruta diferente  
'Because three weeks ago (.) my wife and I (.) came to Barcelona, from Valladolid (.) and it is a (.) different rout'
- SR 31. NS- ((much softer tone)) hay solamente dos trenes (0.3) eso para la ida vamos a ver  
32. (0.6) ((reading from computer screen)) a las nueve y veintiocho que es el tren:  
33. ((talking to herself while looking at the computer)) °puedes ser- este cual es (.)  
34. este no es° ((mumbling)) (0.8)  
((much softer tone)) 'There is only two trains (0.3) that's the way there lets see (0.6) ((reading from computer screen)) at 9:28 that is the train ((talking to herself while looking at the computer)) °could be- this is which one no its is°' ((mumbling)) (0.8)
- AK 35. Ann- esa es la información ah para ir (.) por tren?  
'That is the information to go (.) b train?'
36. NS- si  
'yes'
37. Ann- de Valladolid?  
'from Valladolid?'
38. NS- °sí°  
'°yes°'
39. Ann- directamente a (.) Barcelona  
'directly to (.) Barcelona'
40. NS- °sí sí°  
'°yes yes°'
41. Ann- sí  
'yes'
- (1.2) ((Joe and Ann whispering in English)) ((incomprehensible))
- TS 42. Joe- but I could swear the train we got on in Valladolid came from Salamanca
43. NS- por desgracia solo hay uno  
'unfortunately, there is only one'
- M 44. Ann- hay uno por tren  
'there is one in each train'
- SR 45. NS- solamente hay un tren, pero no sé si hay pla:zas (.) a la una (0.3) del mediodia  
'there is only one train, but I don't know if there are seats (.) at one (0.3)

			midday'
TS	46. Ann-		esto es para:: el viernes, sí? 'this is for Friday, yes?'
ORI	47. NS-		esto para- no! 'this is- no!'
SR	48. Joe-		[domingo= 'Sunday=']
	49. NS-		=[esto el regreso, la ida '=this is the return, the way there']
AK	50. Ann-		la ida 'the way there'
	51. NS-		la ida hay dos trenes,[XXX que hay plaza 'the way there there are two trains, [XXX that there is space']
	52. Ann-		[ahh!]
	53. NS-		y luego el regreso esto XXX ((turning to the computer))(0.2) 'And then the return this XXX'
	54. Joe-		pero no hay plazas? En viernes? 'but there are no seats? On Friday?'
	55. NS-		es que lo tengo que emitir directamente, no se puede ver. 'but I have to issue it directly, one cannot see it.'
	56. Ann-		°cinco y tres° ((reading)) '° five and three°'
	57. Joe-		((to Ann)) ya, that's the train number
	58. Ann-		oh! ok
	59. Joe-		so it's nine thirty or eleven thirty <nine thirty>
	60. Ann-		ok
	61. Joe-		so you can leave Friday night, you'll get there Saturday morning (.) and then return (.) Sunday at one.
	62. Ann-		((to travel agent)) y cuanto cuesta ida y vuelta para: esto? 'And how much is it go and return for this?'
	63. (1.6)		
	64. Ann:		((talking soft to Joe)) and this pays fo:::::r [the train
	65. Joe:		[the train but the problem is that XXXX
	66. Ann-		oh
	67. NS-		esto cuesta treintaicinco euros 'This costs 35 euros'
	68. NS-		( )
	69. Ann-		((giggles softly))
	(0.5)		
	70. NS-		treintaicinco y treintaitres (.) cincuenta. (.) dependiendo del tren °que se coja °
TS	71.		se suman los trayectos y luego hay un veinte por ciento de descuento por tratarse
	72.		de ida y vuelta. '35 and 33 (.) fifty (.) depending of the train °one takes ° the ways are added up and then 20% of discount because it is a both ways.'
M	73. Ann-		ida y vuelta sí 'with return, yes'
ORI	74. NS-		no [vamos a ver. [cad- cada trayecto tiene un precio. que es este este y este= ((pointing at ticket)) 'No [let's see. [ea- each way has a price. That is this and this= ((pointing at ticket))'
	75. Ann-		[no [no?
	76. NS-		=dependiendo de los que se coja hay que sumar los trayectos↑ y luego
	77.		restarles un veinte por ciento. '=depending on what you take one has to add the ways ↑ and then subtract 20%'
	(0.2)		
SR	78. Joe-		you get a twenty per cent discount when you return
AK	79. Ann-		[ahhhhhhh

- AK            80. NS:            [eso es.  
                              ‘[that’s correct.]’  
(0.2)
81. Ann-            Necesitamos encontrar un hotel cuando estamos [en Barcelona si también  
                              ‘We need to find a hotel when we are [in Barcelona yes too’
82. NS:            [en Barcelona  
                              ‘ [in Barcelona’

In this example the interlocutors are trying to build the interaction through several trouble source lines, in which the trouble is not in the language per se or sociocultural notions proper to the participants, but the content together with language difficulties. The travel agent is looking for an airline ticket (in line 4 she is searching for seats in AirEuropa, a Spanish airline), while the NNSs are asking about the possibilities of traveling by train. The travel agent is not paying much attention to them, and tells them there are no spaces available before checking (line 3) (although she says she has checked before). Meanwhile, both NNSs are talking in English about traveling by train instead through other routs (line 6-14). On line 17 there is a potential problem for the communication when the travel agent tells them that there are no spaces in the train, and the Valladolid train is actually the same train. This turn instead of solving the misunderstanding, takes it to a conversation foreclosure. Ann accepts the content and there is a pause (0.4). It is Joe who tries to re-establish the interaction adding some new information (line 21). He knows that the train that is full and goes through Madrid is not the same one that goes through Valladolid. Nevertheless, the travel agent does not accept his repair and creates a new source of trouble when she affirms that it is the same train. Joe answers with a short ‘no’ in a categorical prosody, which may be understood as threatening to the maintenance of the interaction (line 28), immediately both Ann and Joe try to soften the threat and Joe explains how he is so sure about his statement (line 30). After this, the NS resumes to a softer tone of voice, more friendly, while she actually looks at the trains on the computer. After the flow of communication is restored we see a confirmation request from Ann (line 35) to make sure they are now referring to the same topic.

This interaction also shows that those misunderstandings that are resolved in a few turns from the interaction are easier to solve than if several turns pass by (Drummond & Hopper, 1991). In line 43 a new trouble source surfaces when the travel agent uses a referential and leaves out the specific noun in a sentence after coming to the conversation from a long pause (1.2). The miscommunication in this case is triggered by the NS’s utterance being condensed, including an elliptical word: ‘train’, to which the NS referred through the use of a pronoun *uno* (‘one’). This is a common source of misunderstanding between NS/NNS (Bremer, 1996). Ann does not understand what *uno* (‘one’) refers to and she inquires about *uno* referring *asiento* (‘seat’) (line 44), because she is going with three other friends. The misunderstanding is easily resolved in the next turn when the travel agent specifies *un tren* (‘a train’). In a similar way, in line 46, Ann creates a new source of miscommunication when she asks if this information is for Friday, the repair is initiated in the following turn and solved at the same time by the NS and Joe (line 48) who clarifies the day. Ann acknowledges the problem has been resolved by associating the day of the week and the travel trajectory correctly (which had been the misunderstanding item). The conversation is re-established by shifting the topic to clarify another point about the trip (line 50).

In line 70 the NS introduces a new trouble source when she tells the price of the tickets in a quite long and complicated series of numbers and specific vocabulary to the raveling by train domain. This difficult utterance comes after an unproblematic sequence (lines 49-69) and when NS are talking to NNs, even if they are usually good at adapting to the linguistic means of a beginner learner, after an unproblematic sequence, they tend to ‘lapse back into ‘normal’ manner of delivery’

(Bremer, 1996, pg. 52). This made the sentence fast and linguistically complex. In addition, the content is strongly rooted in cultural practices. It is necessary to understand how the train system functions in order to understand that the tickets cost depending on the amount of *trayectos* ('legs'). This combination provokes a misunderstanding stated by Ann who thinks this is the total price of the ticket (line 73). The NS immediately initiates the repair of the misunderstanding with an explicit negative to Ann's question, a vocative to attract the hearer's attention, and elaboration on the statement before, this time without using numbers. It is Joe who in line 78, using English, adds the information that repairs the conversation by using English. Ann acknowledges the repair and so does the travel agent that only at this point seems to actually understand English. The interaction is re-established and it is again Ann who continues the interaction by starting a new topic relevant to the service encounter.

This interaction exemplifies how misunderstandings may have several onsets which may be linguistic in origin (lines 43-46), based on different goals by the different participants (lines 17-34), or a combination of linguistic and sociocultural origin (lines 70-79).

And in this interaction we can also see that in spite of being close to total break of communication, the interaction was re-established several times with the collaboration of all participants. In addition the data also shows that a shift of topic is the preferred move after the interaction has been re-established.

### Case 5. At the bus station. A very complicated answer to an easy question

Joe is at a Spanish bus station. The employee (Emp) at the ticket window is a male, about 40 years old. There is a glass window between them with a tray in the lower part through which they conduct the money and ticket exchange.

- |          |          |                                                                                                                                |
|----------|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | 1. Joe-  | hola,<br>'hello'                                                                                                               |
|          |          | ((woman talking on the background, unrelated to conversation)) (.15)                                                           |
|          | 2. Joe   | hola hay espacio uhmm (.) para dos personas<br>'hello is there space uhmm for two people'                                      |
|          | 3. E –   | para cuantos?<br>'for how many?'                                                                                               |
|          | 4. Joe-  | dos personas a las ocho<br>'two people at eight'                                                                               |
|          | 5. Emp-  | a Valladolid?<br>'to Valladolid'                                                                                               |
|          | 6. Joe-  | sí<br>'yes'                                                                                                                    |
|          | 7. Emp-  | hoy?<br>'today?'                                                                                                               |
| TS/<br>M | 8. Joe-  | hoy(..)y ehh están libros dieci:sieteydieciocho? creo que: es (.) alado salida, (..)y <b>vuelto</b>                            |
|          | 9.       | en domingo<br>'today (..) and ehh are book (free)17 and 18? I think that it is next to exit, (..) and turn (return) on Sunday' |
| ORI      | 10. Emp- | qué número me dijo? (.) de asiento?<br>'what number did you+polite tell me? the seat?'                                         |
|          | 11. Joe- | uhmm                                                                                                                           |
| ORI      | 12. Emp- | sí . pero qué=?<br>'yes, but what'                                                                                             |
| SRI      | 13. Joe- | =al lado (.) salida (.) emergencia (/emergeryencia/)<br>'to the side (.) exit (.) emergency'                                   |
| ORI      | 14. Emp- | salida emergencia? e:l treintaicinco treintaiseis?<br>'emergency exit? the 35 36?'                                             |

- (1.5)
- ORI 15. Emp- o sea está alado de la puerta, el treintaicinco y el treintaseis.  
'that is it is next to the door'
- SRI 16. Joe- a sí? . porque soy . alto ah! (.) y un poco mas espacio ah!  
'ok? . because I am . tall and a little more space ah!'
- SR 17. Emp- sí ahí está bien, () parte libre de adelante  
'yes, that is a good one, () more room in front'
- AK 18. Joe- vale. (..) y **vuelto** en domingo.  
'ok. (..) and return(mispronounced) on Sunday'
19. Emp- a la?  
'at?'
20. Joe- a las ocho.  
'at eight'
21. Emp- ocho de la tarde?  
'eight in the evening?'
22. Joe- sí (..) para dos personas sí?  
'yes (..) for two people, right?'
- ((Emp is issuing the ticket)) (1.5)
23. Emp- está en () de la línea con tarjeta no se puede pagar lo (siento)  
'it is in () of the line with credit card one cannot pay (sorry)'
24. Joe- () tengo dinero  
'I have money'
- ((Joe takes out wallet)) (1.9)
25. Emp- veintidós con doce.  
'Twenty two with twelve.'
- (1.0)((sound of coins on the window tray)) (1.3)
26. Emp- muy bien! ((Employ puts tickets on tray))  
'very good!'
27. Joe- gracias.  
'thanks.'
28. Emp- de nada.  
'you're welcome.'

In this interaction the trouble source and point of misunderstanding is on line 8, when Joe, the NNS, inquires about the seats in front of the emergency seat. The utterance in line 8 condenses too much information for this type of exchange. So far in the interaction, each sequential pair has resolved one detail of the ticket. Lines 2-4 deal with the number of tickets, lines 5-6 with destination. The employee has been asking a single-answer question in each turn. Line 3 'how many?', line 5 'to Valladolid?'. In line 7 he also asks a question that requires 'yes' or 'no' as an answer. The NNS answers the question ('today'), and without any pause, goes into inquiring about the availability of two concrete seats he think are by the emergency exit and also introduces additional data about the return date. The question was not expected as shown by the employee's turn in which he asks Joe to repeat the numbers ('what numbers did you say?') (line 10), this is the first attempt to repair the miscommunication (other initiated repair). In addition the trouble source turn includes the word *salida* ('exit') but the NNS never produces an audible word *emergencia* ('emergency'). The second part of the employee's utterance (line 10) shows he has not understood Joe's idea of the seats being by the emergency exit. He asks 'what number did you tell me? of seat?' ignoring the key point of the information being that the numbers are not as important as the seats being by the emergency exit. Key point which the NNS tries to get across again when repairing his previous utterance, (line 13). The NNS does not answer this question, seems to be thinking or trying to remember the numbers as by the sound 'uhmmm' (line 11). At this point of breakage it is the NS that tries to rebuild the interaction by asking again (line 12), but he does so in such an ambiguous way that is not clear what he actually asking about. Faced with this ambiguity, the NNS tries to push across his main point (the seats are by the emergency exit), which this time the employer recognizes,

formulating a confirmation requests (line 14) ‘emergency exit?’ and ‘thirty five thirty six?’. Since his questions are not answered by Joe, he goes into elaboration and reformulation of the utterance (line 15). Joe then accepts his seats numbers and the misunderstanding is successfully repaired by the NS who also adds more information about the seats that confirms they are at the emergency exit (‘yes that’s good and they ( ) more room in the front’). The NS acknowledges the repair explicitly ‘vale’ (‘ok’), and re-states the communication by moving into another topic, about the return date (that had been ignored in line 8-9) when the miscommunication developed.

In this interaction the miscommunication, in line 8, was due to several factors: grammatical, pragmatical, and content related. First, the use of a complicated unexpected utterance also charged with grammatical inaccuracies and pauses. The NNS used the word *libros* (‘books’) instead of *libres* (‘free’), and *vuelto* instead of *vuelta*. He also used a direct translation from the English utterance ‘are 17 and 18 available?’, but in Spanish the use of the noun *asientos* (‘seats’) next to the numbers is required (since it had not been used any time before in the interaction). In addition, the answer was not following the expected pattern set by the question, a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question, and was not following the pattern that the participants had established for the interaction, short questions and answers, interview style. Furthermore, the utterance carried unexpected content, and was pragmatically inappropriate. It is not customary to ask for specific seats when purchasing an autobus ticket, as confirmed by most passengers not seating on their assigned seats, or not knowing where the seat numbers are located (personal experience).

#### Case 6. Echinacea and pragmalinguistic failure

NNS returns to a shop to buy some Echinacea pills, but they have not arrived yet.

- |     |       |       |                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----|-------|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | 1.    | NNS - | hola,<br>‘hello’                                                                                                                                        |
|     | 2.    | NS -  | hola<br>‘hello’                                                                                                                                         |
|     | 3.    | NNS - | hola<br>‘hello’                                                                                                                                         |
|     | 4.    | NS -  | a ver!<br>‘let’s’                                                                                                                                       |
|     | 5.    | NNS - | tinene equines[ea?<br>‘do you have echinacea? (english pronunciation)’                                                                                  |
|     | 6.    | NS -  | [tardan en llegar porque: no tengo en el almacen de valladolid y                                                                                        |
|     | 7.    |       | las he tenido que pedir a barcelona<br>‘it takes time to arrive because i don’t have in the supplier in valladolid and I had to ask barcelona for them’ |
| TS  | 8.    | NNS - | oh ok (disappointed)                                                                                                                                    |
|     | (0.4) |       |                                                                                                                                                         |
| ORI | 9.    | NS -  | entonces las tienen que mandar el paquete                                                                                                               |
|     | (0.3) |       |                                                                                                                                                         |
| ORI | 10.   | NS    | lo que pasa es que las tengo en extracto<br>‘so they have to send the package what it happens is that I have them in extract’                           |
|     | 11.   | NNS - | no (.) no [interesa<br>‘no (.) not interested’                                                                                                          |
|     | 12.   |       | [no te gusta<br>‘[you don’t like them’                                                                                                                  |
|     | 13.   | NNS - | no no (0.2)                                                                                                                                             |
|     | 14.   | NS -  | entonces yo espero que el lunes lleguen desde barcelona<br>‘then i hope they arrive on monday from barcelona’                                           |
|     | 15.   | NNS - | oh ok (disappointed)                                                                                                                                    |
|     | 16.   | NS -  | porque tiene que venir el paquete desde allí y tarda más<br>‘because the package has to arrive from there and it takes longer’                          |

17. NNS - ok, (.)  
 18. NS - por eso  
           ‘that’s why’  
 (1.4)  
 SR 19. NNS - vale gracias  
           ‘ok thanks’  
 20. NS - gracias a ti, hasta luego  
           ‘thank you, see you later’

Although apparently there is no miscommunication in this interaction, a closer look at the pauses and the NNS’s answers show that there are actually problems on the pragmatics of the social interaction. If we compare this interaction with a similar interaction involving the same seller and another NS a few days earlier, we can see where the problem in this interaction raises.

1. NS- hola  
       ‘hello’  
 2. Shp- hola. buenas ta:rdes  
       ‘hello, good evening’  
 3. NS- las velas de limón llegaron ya?  
       ‘the lemon candles, have they arrive?’  
 4. Shp- no:↓, no tenían en el almacén de aquí ↓  
       ‘no: ↓, they didn’t have in the suppliers here ↓’  
 5. NS- bueno ↓, la próxima semana entonces?  
       ‘ok ↓ next week then?’  
 6. Shp- sí, espero que ya estén.  
       ‘yes, I hope they are (here)’  
 7. NS- vale ↓, me paso entonces el lunes  
       ‘ok ↓, I’ll pass by on Monday then’  
 8. Shp- va:le::, hasta lue::go  
       ‘ok, see you later’  
 9. NS- adiós  
       ‘bye’

In this dialogue we can see that the NS in line 5 has understood line 4 as enough explanation for her question in line 3. She confirms the understanding ‘*bueno*’ and the question moves into a different topic, (when are the candles going to arrive). The shop assistant recognizes the pre-closings ‘*vale*’ and the intonation contour of the sentence (line 7) and responds appropriately by ending the conversation.

In contrast, the NNS did fail to recognize the pre-closings from the shop assistant (lines 6-7) as marked by the intonation and the long pause at the end of her turn. Instead of closing the conversation here, the NNS responds with minimal feedback and using an intonation that invited his interlocutor to continue. At the point, the assistant is obliged to continue with another explanation, paraphrasing the excuse that she has given before. It is not until turn 17 that the NNS closes the conversation. This conversation shows that service encounters are different to a regular conversation. In a regular conversation, the NS would have probably ended his/her turn and wait for a closing response, and in the absence of this s/he would have closed the conversation him/herself, letting the NNS confused about the break of communication. However, in a service interaction the shop attendance has as much to loose as the client, and this is motivation enough to keep the communication flow until the client is ready to close it. This is an example of pragmalinguistic failure. This situation usually results in inappropriate behaviour and may lead to the NS thinking that the NNS is impolite or it may even be attributed to an intentionality that does

not necessarily have. From the NNS perspective it is also more difficult to repair because the problem is not salient to them.

### Case 7. At the Bank. Different agendas.

NNS enters this bank for the second time. The first time he wanted to change money but the quantity was too large for this branch and they sent him to the main branch. He comes back to ask for directions to the main branch, but the cashier offers to change the money and take it herself to the main branch later. He still needs direction to the other branch because he wants to open an account there, what he doesn't share with the bank teller.

	1.	NNS	hola 'hello'
TS	2.	NS -	los has podido cambiar? 'Have you been able to change them?'
M1	3.	NNS -	lo siento olvidé direcciones 'I am sorry I forgot directions'
ORI1	4.	NS -	perdona? 'Excuse me?'
SRI/M2	5.	NNS -	olvidé::, (.) 'I forgot'
ORI2	6.	NS -	olvida:ste? 'you forgot?'
SRI2	7.	NNS -	sí 'yes'
ORI2	8.	NS -	el qué? 'what?'
SR2	9.	NNS -	y:: dónde está el otra ofcina- 'and where is the other office ((error in agreement))'
AK/SRI	10.	NS -	ah (.) les tienes aquí? (.) les tienes aquí los dólares? ((regional intonat.)) 'ah! (.) do you have them here? (.) do you have them here, the dollars?'
SR1	11.	NNS -	sí 'yes'
	12.	NS -	les has cambiado ya? 'have you changed them already?'
	13.	NNS -	es posible? o necesito [ ir a 'is it possible? Or do I need to go to'
	14.	NS -	[sí traelos traelos (.) [te los cambio, sí 'yes bring them (.) I change them, yes'
	15.	NNS -	[ok (.) ok
SIR1	16.	NNS -	pero donde es la otra oficina? 'but where is the other branch?'
SR	17.	NS -	es allí (.) esta calle todo recto (.) 'it's over there (.) this street down'
AK1	18.	NNS -	↑ok
	19.	NS -	pero bueno por si acaso te lo cambio yo aquí y ya está [porque si no_ 'but well, just in case I'll change them for you here and that's it [because if not'
	20.	NNS -	[está bien? ' [is that all right?'
	21.	NS -	ya voy yo (.) luego puedo ir yo sabes 'I'll go myself (.) later, I can go, you know'
	22.	NNS -	oh no!, es posible para mi [es es (English structure) 'oh, no! It is possible for me it's it's'
	23.	NS -	[no (.) para hacértelo mas cómodo (.) déjalo! 'no, to make it easier for you, don't worry!'
	24.	NNS -	ok ((laughing))

This interaction starts by both participants initiating different topics that they would try to carry on without the support of the other participant. This leads inevitably to several miscommunications. The NS, who sent the NNS to another bank to change the money wants to know about this topic: line 2, *los has podido cambiar?* ('did you manage to change them'). We can see from the interaction that the participants know each other and they have talked before about a specific topic as marked by the use of the pronoun *los* ('them') in her opening utterance without its reference noun. On the other hand the NNS comes in the bank with a different purpose, to ask for directions. He doesn't acknowledge the NS's question at all and states his purpose for having come back to the bank, (line 3) *lo siento olvidé direcciones* ('I am sorry I forgot directions'). This turn, which should have been an answer to the question before, (immediate pair), breaks up the flow of the interaction and forces the NS to try to repair by asking directly about the misunderstanding 'excuse me?' (line 4).

The NNS tries to repair this misunderstanding (self initiated repair) by restating the same phrase, but his delay in producing the sentence forces the help of the NS, which tries to elicit the words from him (line 6). Instead the NNS takes this as confirmation check and answers 'yes' instead of finishing his utterance (line 7), this takes the NS to ask more explicitly, by asking exactly about the direct object of the sentence, the element that is still ambiguous, *el qué?* ('what?'). In English 'what' could be asking either about the object or the subject, but in Spanish the use of the article in front of the interrogative particle, makes clear the question is about the direct object of the sentence and not the subject. Finally, the NNS successfully repairs the interaction by rephrasing and clarifying his first statement (line 9). The NS then acknowledges and this misunderstanding is solved. The conversation is rebuilt by the NS, who still has not been able to push her topic into the interaction. This time she asks in a direct way which causes no problem to the interaction and gets her the answer she has searching for since line 2. But still the NNS has not found out where the other bank branch is. He goes back to this topic (line 16) which the NS successfully resolves in line 17 by giving directions. The directions are very vague though ('over there' 'this street all the way to the end'), and if the NNS had followed them he would have never arrived at the bank. Nevertheless, for the NS this topic is not important since she is already helping him at what he is supposed to be doing at the other bank.

## Conclusion

Looking again at the research questions, we can now provide some answers, always limited of course, to the reality of the data analyzed. For an overview see Figure 2 on Appendix 1.

Q1: How does misunderstanding occur? (types of misunderstanding). The sources of miscommunication were mainly grammatical (most often lexical), based on content and based on the pragmatics of social interaction.

Q2: Who attempts to repair the miscommunication and how? (types of repair initiation). The repair sequences were initiated both by NS and NNS. The repair was more successful when the repair was done close to the point of misunderstanding. Both self-initiated and other-initiated repairs appeared in the data, and it was usually a combination of both that lead to the successful repair of the interaction, what seems to prove the importance of collaborating to repair the interaction.

Q3: Who repairs the misunderstanding and how is it done? (repair process). The resources that the participants used to repair the interaction varied from visual reference, such as pointing at an element, to full negatives followed by repetitions or reformulations. The data also showed that clarification requests and confirmation checks were often used to initiate the repair sequence. The

repairs were done both by Ns and NNS, although in most of the cases it was the NS who achieved the restoration of the interaction. The strategies that successfully restored the communication vary greatly, from simply supply the lexical item that was the source of trouble to the use of corrective 'no' + supplying the correct information, to the share of pragmatic knowledge that was previously ignored by the NNS. An interesting point is that only 3 strategies of those presented by Tzanne (2000) appeared in the data: speaker corrects in the form 'not X, Y' or 'No, Y'; speakers corrects in form 'Y', and speaker invites hearer non-verbally to consider interpretation'. In addition, clarification requests and confirmation checks, not included in her framework, appeared often in the data.

Q4: What happens after the misunderstanding is repaired? (re-building the interaction). The data illustrates that there is usually some type of acknowledgment that the interaction has been re-established (in all cases except one) as the first step towards the re-construction of the interaction. Both NS and NNS re-established the flow of communication and continued the interaction by using several strategies, although two of them were more frequent: continue the normal pattern of a service interaction, or revert back to information that had been ignored when the communication broke down. These strategies may be a reflection of service encounters interaction, in which both participants have a set goal to reach and collaboration is essential to obtain it. Another interesting point that comes out in this service encounters data is that when NNS are engaged in co-constructing the interaction they actually focus on the content and not simply on the form to maintain a 'polite' conversation without real understanding (cases 1, 2 and 7 especially). This was a point of concern presented by Færch and Kasper (1986), which stated that in studies of negotiation, the participants may be maintaining the conversation to ensure 'formal' rather than 'substantive' understanding.

In general, all interactions show that in order to achieve understanding both participants need to cooperate in the construction of the interaction; and that both misunderstandings and repairs are part of the process of constructing communication. In order to help NNS to be socially competent interactors of a language we need to incorporate the process of co-construction in their language training, paying attention not only to the linguistic component but to the socio-pragmatics involved in the communication process.

As for further research, it would be interesting to develop materials and activities that bring co-construction of interaction to the classroom and find their impact on the students' language and sociopragmatics acquisition. In addition, more research involving NNS needs to be done in different types of encounters, to see what the variations and consistencies of their interactions are. There is a wide-open field of study waiting.

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