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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Setting up the problem: Interaction and understanding in talk between native and non-native speakers

This book explores the interaction between native and non-native speakers. In particular, the focus of this study is on interactional understanding: how mutual intelligibility is established, checked and remedied in conversation where the participants do not have equal access to the linguistic resources. This issue is addressed by investigating interaction and the progress of conversation in a range of authentic institutional and everyday situations where native (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of Finnish meet and talk with each other.

The following excerpt illustrates a conversational exchange which is typical of contemporary Finland (and other similar societies): an information exchange in an office between a client and a professional (cf. Sarangi & Slembrouck 1996). This exchange takes place in an office of an educational institution offering courses to foreigners in Finland; the participants are the native Finnish-speaking secretary and the client who speaks Finnish as a second language. The speakers are engaged in taking care of the matter that has brought the client to the office, which is the aim of such service encounters.

(1) Office. The client (P) has come to the office in order to ask for help with filling in an application form for the student allowance. The secretary (S) is asking the relevant information and writing it down in the form.

```
01 S: On-ko  tei-llä    laps-i-a?
      have-Q you.pl-ADE child-pl-PAR
      Do you have children?
02 P: J[o- on m Venäjä-lle jä-i      [minä e-n
      y[e- have Russian-ALL stay-PST [I NEG-1
      Y[e- I do m in Russia stayed   [I don't
       [                             [
03 S:  [Jos-                         [joo (.)
       [If-                          [yes (.)
```

```
04 P: ti[edä mi-tä    se (on).]
      kn[ow  what-PAR it (is) ]
      kn[ow what it (is).     ]
        [                     ]
05 S:   [maksa-tte-ko         ] hei-stä  elatusa↑pu-a
        [pay-2.pl-Q           ] they-ELA alimony-PAR
        [do you pay           ] alimony for them
06 P: Joo minä maksa-n mutt::a se: #ee# m:- m:i-tä se: se #öö#
      PRT I    pay-1   but     it          what-PAR it  it
      Yes I pay but:: it: #ee# w:- w:hat is: is #eh# it's not
07    ei #ö# (2.0) ei ole (.) papere-i-ta  [(.) sieltä
      NEG          NEG is     paper-pl-PAR [    there
      #eh# (2.0) there's no (.) papers (.) [from there
                                           [
08 S:                                      [↑Mm
09 P: koska   se on hehhh
      because it is hehhh
10 S: Just joo.   (.) maksatte epävirallises↑ti
      Okay right. (.) you pay  unofficial↑ly
11 P: Joo.
      Yes.
12 S: Jo[o  just
      Ye[ah right
        [
13 P:   [°Epävirallisesti°
        [°Unofficially°
```

As can be expected in second language conversations, the non-native speaker occasionally displays some linguistic difficulty in formulating utterances or in finding lexical items. In the excerpt above, the NNS's turn (lines 6–7) is rather fragmentary, containing several hesitation sounds, sound stretches, pauses and restarts. Moreover, the utterance is left incomplete (line 9); the complement in the utterance is not produced. Despite these markers of hesitancy, there are no breaches in mutual understanding; the NS displays understanding by first acknowledging what the NNS has said and then by rephrasing the NNS's meaning (line 10). The participants thus manage to establish mutual understanding which is sealed by their reciprocal confirmations (lines 11–12).

This book is about instances in second language conversations where mutual understanding is potentially at stake – instances where the smooth conversational progress is halted. These instances are investigated by discussing when, and how, the conversational progress is disrupted; in what environments do the speakers begin to modify their own or the other's talk, what are the elements that are being modified, and how do the participants return to the talk-in-progress after these modification sequences. This book approaches understanding and the problems of understanding from a linguistic and interactional point of view, focusing on the participants' joint construction of the meanings of the turns and of the whole interaction.

In the modern industrialised world, the number of institutions where professional activities are performed mostly in and through second language conversations is increasing rapidly, and the participants of these encounters do not form any culturally or linguistically unified group. Tendencies such as 'marketisation' or 'conversationalisation' (Fairclough 1996) in late modern societies have resulted in the colonisation of ordinary life by economic and bureaucratic systems, and the increasing mobility of people makes these systems linguistically heterogeneous. Professionals and clients with varying linguistic backgrounds therefore need to negotiate about the relevant matters with the linguistic resources they have. In addition, the mobility of people not only affects the institutional or bureaucratic systems; members of contemporary modern societies are also privately more and more involved in interactional situations where all the participants do not share linguistic resources.

The aim of this book is to shed light on these linguistically asymmetric interactions, to determine what kind of problems may emerge in them and how these problems are related to the participants' nativeness or non-nativeness on the one hand, and on the other hand, to the type of the interaction (e.g. institutional vs. everyday conversation) as well as the interactional activities and linguistic practices that characterise these different interactions.

1.2 Method of study, transcription, and data: Institutional vs. everyday conversation

This study is conversation analytic in its orientation. It treats understanding as a dynamic communicational phenomenon, and it is based on the interactional or dialogical perspective on language. The methodological tools and organisational principles of conversation analysis (henceforth CA) form a key resource for the analyses (Sacks 1992a and b; for reviews of CA methodology, see e.g. Heritage 1984a, 1989; Psathas 1995; Pomerantz & Fehr 1997; Hutchby & Wooffit 1998; ten Have 1998). In particular, the mechanisms through which interactants deal with problems in hearing, understanding or producing talk (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977) are central for the study of interactional understanding.

Until recently, the CA tradition has been monolingual. Researchers have worked with everyday conversation and later with different types of institutional interaction, but the interactants have mainly had the same mother tongue. One explanation for this "bias" is the methodological basis of CA. As a part of its ethnomethodological heritage, CA is interested in the concept of 'membership' and the members' competences which underlie ordinary social activities. CA is "directed at describing and explicating the competences which *ordinary* speakers use and rely on when they engage in *intelligible*, conversational interaction" (Heritage 1984a: 241, emphasis added). That is, CA sets out to study members' practices, which are taken to be shared and arise from shared competencies involved in being a user of a language. It has thus been (at least tacitly) assumed that sharing practices presupposes sharing a language (cf. Firth 1996).

This presupposition is, however, challenged in the expanding body of research which applies CA to linguistically asymmetric conversations, i.e. conversations which involve non-native speakers, speakers with different speech disorders, very young children, etc. (e.g. Goodwin 2003; Gardner & Wagner 2004; Richards & Seedhouse 2005). The results of these studies can contribute to our understanding of shared practices and membership, and further shed light on the fundamental methodological question of whether, or to what extent, practices for talking, understanding and reasoning rely on sharing a language.

One of the fundamental principles of CA is the "emic" relevance of the different category memberships: the relevance of different categories has to arise from the data, as it is the participants (not the researcher) who can make particular categories relevant or salient (cf. e.g. Psathas 1995: 8–9). This demand to avoid precategorisation – to avoid imposing categories or roles on the data that might not have 'procedural relevance' (i.e. relevance that is demonstrable in the talk itself; see Schegloff 1991) – is perhaps another explanation for why CA and second language research have not been combined earlier. Those interested in second language talk are obviously keen on finding out what it is to be a learner and what it means to communicate with limited resources. The categories of 'native' and 'non-native' or 'learner' have been self-evident (and the reason for study) for many second language researchers. From a strict CA perspective, this is not a valid starting-point. The relevance of the speaker identities should be the result of the analysis, not the beginning of it (about CA and applied linguistics, see Schegloff, Koshik, Jacoby, & Olsher 2002). Shedding light on the (possible) interactional relevance of the speakers' linguistic identities is one of the aims of this study. It is a fact that the natives and non-natives in my data interact with each other, but what remains to be seen is whether they interact **as** a native and as non-native speaker.

Despite the tension between a "pure CA approach" (allowing the data to guide the research) and an "applied second-language approach" (to find out something about being a learner), there is a growing interest in combining these two research traditions. Because of globalisation, both the volume of NS-NNS interaction and the variety of languages involved have increased exponentially over the last decades. Members of divergent societies are increasingly involved in various interactional situations, both publicly and privately, and all these participants do not share linguistic resources. Thus there is a need to find out what a context-bound but rigorous method can reveal about asymmetric interaction, and within the framework of CA, increasing interest has evolved to broaden the monolingual research agenda, especially during the last decade (see e.g. Kalin 1995; Firth 1996; Carroll 2000; Wong 2000a, b and c; Kurhila 2001; Egbert 2004; Gardner & Wagner 2004; Richards & Seedhouse 2005).

It is a challenge to combine a method which builds upon the notion of intersubjectivity (e.g. Heritage 1984a; Schegloff 1992), and data where the participants (and the analyst) have limitations in their shared linguistic knowledge. According to Schegloff (in Wong & Olsher 2000: 114–115), "basically – people ought to work on materials in a language and culture that they're native members of, so that all the native intuitions, whatever they are, are mobilized". However, work on linguistically asymmetric conversations has already been successfully undertaken and, since such conversations are naturally occurring real interactions, there is no in-principle reason why they could not be studied from a CA perspective. Also, it is evident that attempts to limit the type of data that could be "legitimately" investigated by a conversation analyst lead to major problems. What would be the "sufficient shared culture" that the participants and the analyst should have? Which category memberships (gender, age, social class, race, nationality, mother tongue, etc.) would have to be the same and which could be different? It is not my intention to undermine the usefulness of shared background in analysing conversation; I only want to emphasize that boundaries cannot be erected between "acceptable" and "non-acceptable" data. It is, however, the analysis rather than general considerations which ultimately can prove the viability of CA for any type of data.

The data of this study consist of approximately 16 hours of naturally occurring conversation in a range of everyday and institutional situations in Finland. The majority of conversations have been recorded in offices of three educational institutions offering courses on Finnish language for non-native speakers. In these dyadic conversations, the participants are the secretaries (i.e. the native speakers of Finnish) and the clients are those who either study at the institution, or who are planning to begin study there (i.e. the non-native speakers of Finnish). In addition to these office encounters, the data include conversations at the reception desk of a hotel, at the information desk in a bus station, and in the office hours of two teachers who teach Finnish as a second language at the university. Along with this institutional data, other sources of data are seven informal conversations between two friends (a Finn and his/her foreign friend), and two multi-party conversations involving both native and non-native speakers of Finnish. Institutional conversations thus form the biggest part of the database: approximately 11 hours, versus 5 hours of everyday conversation. There are approximately 100 non-native speakers in the data, from all over the world, and their knowledge of Finnish varies greatly. There are 22 native Finnish speakers, of whom five are secretaries. The data were both audio- and videotaped (although two everyday conversations were only audiotaped).

For the office conversations, the duration of each encounter varied greatly, depending on the clients' reasons for visiting. Some clients just came to the office to get a stamp in their credit book, whereas others wanted help in various matters concerning different types of permission and applications. Generally, the organisation of the encounters follows the structure of front desk encounters outlined by Kidwell (2000: 20–21):

1. Opening
2. Request for service
3. Optional interrogative series
4. Provision, or not, of the service
5. Closing.

The optional interrogative series varied somewhat depending on the type of the office, and the relationship between the secretary and the client. Two of the three educational institutions were large well-established institutions which have over one hundred students and many different courses, so that the secretary cannot be expected to know everybody by name or sight. In these institutions, the interrogative series included the identification of the client, since the client's status as an "already-enrolled" or "not-yet-enrolled" student was consequential for the subsequent procedures and for the relevant information. In contrast, the third "institution" was an intensive one-month summer course on Finnish language which is organised annually by the Ministry of Education. The participants for such a course are selected beforehand and their number is restricted to around 25. The identification sequence was not necessary at the office of this course, since the secretary knew all the participants, and the participants had the same status with respect to the institution.

The everyday conversations in the data were recorded in a variety of settings: two co-workers talking to each other while working in a small factory, a beauty therapist doing a friend's facial, people having dinner and tea parties and two friends talking to each other on the phone.

All in all, my database is rather heterogeneous. From a CA point of view, it is mundane conversation which is the primary data source, since its mechanisms organise the basic forms of social action and interaction (Zimmerman & Boden 1991: 4). However, the variety of the data enables this study to include dimensions such as institutionality in the analysis. Looking at phenomena both in mundane and in clearly goal-oriented institutional conversation increases our knowledge of the use and distribution of different linguistic practices, and thus sheds light on the linguistic realisation of institutionality (cf. Drew & Heritage 1992a). Moreover, the analysis of the interactional relevance of the participants' linguistic identities can be sharpened when the participants' activities can be observed in a range of varying situations. For example, it will be shown that the salience of the participants' linguistic identities is connected to their institutional roles and the tasks and activities typical of those roles.

The question of the mobilisation of different identities or category memberships has been at the heart of CA since the very beginning (see Sacks 1992 [e.g. fall 1965, spring 1966, spring 1967]). For this reason, CA can be considered to be an excellent tool for exploring the potential relevance of '(non-)nativeness' (see also Egbert 2004). However, from an anthropological point of view, CA has been criticised for being a too "bloodless and impersonal method" (Moerman 1988: x) for the study of conversation between people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Moerman insists that conversation must be studied in ways that are sensitive to the languages, cultures and settings in which social interaction occurs (ibid.: xi). Other lines of research, which also have paid more attention to the role of culture in conversation, are e.g. interactional sociolinguistics, most notably represented in the work by Gumperz (see e.g. 1982a and b, 1991 together with Roberts), as well as other empirical research on intercultural or interethnic communication (see e.g. Scollon & Scollon 1995; Rampton 1995; Di Luzio, Günthner, & Orletti 2001). However, as my data consist of approximately 100 non-native speakers with greatly varying language skills and linguistic backgrounds, it is not possible to focus on a particular ethnic identity. Rather, I will investigate situations where the non-nativeness (i.e. a minority identity regardless of the country of origin) can be oriented to.

The examples in this study have been transcribed according to the conversation analytic conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (cf. Atkinson &

Heritage 1984: ix–xvi). Transcription and glossing symbols are explained in Appendix. The turns in the examples are mostly represented by three lines: the first line is the original Finnish utterance, the second is the gloss line and the third line in bold is an approximate English translation. The gloss line is left out when it does not provide relevant information (e.g. in short utterances, where the English translation is word-for-word, or in utterances that repeat a part of the prior talk which already has been glossed in the example).

Many "non-native speech features" produced by the NNSs surface at the morphological level, concerning for example, case endings. This is somewhat problematic for the translation, as Finnish and English are typologically very different. Finnish is an agglutinative language, which expresses grammatical functions, dependency relations and locations primarily by attaching various word-final suffixes. Nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs and numerals are inflected, and the inflectional morphemes are attached to the end of words as suffixes. The gloss line provides information on the different alternatives produced by the NNS if possible; the differences in typology and pronunciation between Finnish and English restrict idiomatic translation. In problematic cases, I provide comments on the translations in the text or in the footnotes.

Gaze is marked in the transcripts where it is considered to be relevant in the interpretation of the example. I use a version of the system introduced by Goodwin (1981) and modified by Seppänen (1997, 1998). The speaker's gaze is marked above the turn and the recipient's gaze under the turn. The one who is gazing is indicated by the same initial that is used elsewhere in the transcript. A line (---) demonstrates the time one participant is gazing at the other, dots (...) illustrate the moment when the participant shifts her gaze towards the other participant, and commas (,,,) stand for the moment when the participant shifts her gaze away from the other participant. As almost all the examples come from dyadic conversations, the person the gaze is directed to is not mentioned above the line, given that it is always the other speaker.

In the transcripts, the letter S stands for the native Finnish speaker, and all the other letters represent the non-native speakers. I have used the terms 'native' (NS) and 'non-native speaker' (NNS) in this book, although I am aware of the problems associated with these terms (cf. Firth & Wagner 1997; Carroll 2000). I admit that the label 'NNS' is vague and stipulates very little about the language skills of the speaker, but I have used it since it is still predominant in the studies on second language interaction. I use the acronyms 'NS' and 'NNS' to identify the speakers (instead of their names) and because, from time to time, these linguistic categories are shown to be relevant in the interaction. Yet I want to emphasize that the speaker status is only one of the innumerable categories an individual can be ascribed to and not *an sich* more or less relevant, static or homogeneous than the other categories.

1.3 Second language comprehension vs. interactional understanding

The foci of this book – linguistic practices that are used in second language interaction to check and remedy the breaches in mutual understanding – have increasingly attracted attention in the recent research on second language acquisition (henceforth SLA). The present study contributes to this line of research but at the same time differs in some fundamental ways from the mainstream SLA studies. I will address these differences in order to relate my study to the field of SLA, and to show how SLA research could profit from interactionally oriented second language research.

Second-language speech has been an area of interest and subject of study especially since the early 1980's. The empirical work on second language talk is largely concerned with language acquisition.[1] In this line of research, psycholinguistic and mental orientations toward language have been dominant (cf. Firth & Wagner 1997; Atkinson 2002). Although SLA studies often acknowledge that language acquisition takes place in a social setting, the object of inquiry is still the internal, mental process, the acquisition of new linguistic knowledge (Long 1997: 319). Contextual and situational dimensions in the language samples that are investigated are treated as external secondary factors, separate from the real object of inquiry. As Poulisse (1997: 324) observes: "You first need to describe the basic processes of learning and using language, and then to discuss the contextual factors that may influence these processes." Thus, according to the mentalist SLA perspective, language (as a system), the use of the system and contextual factors are seen as separable. It then follows from this position that understanding – or comprehension, as it is usually referred to in SLA literature – is approached as a problem between the learner and the language rather than a problem between the interlocutors. For this reason, comprehension in SLA research is often measured by using some external criteria, e.g. the success of completing some predefined task (to draw a picture, to place objects correctly on a board, etc.). Interaction is treated as a variable possibly influencing comprehension and it is investigated insofar as it is consequential in completing the task successfully (see e.g. Gass & Varonis 1994; Long, Inagaki & Ortega 1998; Polio & Gass 1998). Generally, according to the SLA tradition, interaction is not seen as fundamentally being co-constructed as it is in CA thinking, where meanings are thought to be jointly created in the interaction. SLA treats meanings as packages that originate in one speaker, who then tries to transmit the message as accurately as possible to the other speaker so that she could then decode it (Poulisse 1997: 327).

The interactional approach adopted in this study is based on a different view of language and interaction. According to the conversation analytic perspective, language use cannot be separated from its context. In other words, we do not speak in order to produce words and grammar, we speak in order to achieve various aims, in order to have an effect on other people. The immediate interactional environment (micro-context) and a larger macro-context are therefore fundamentally relevant to any piece of talk. Our talk is shaped by the context, and we also create or renew the context through our talk (Heritage 1984a). Thus, the speech by any speaker, whether native or non-native, should be investigated as it is produced in interaction, tied to the contextual and social environment in which it is uttered. Moreover, CA considers interaction and understanding to be intertwined. As a consequence, interaction cannot be merely a factor consisting of the speaker's linguistic contributions, which can then be controlled and manipulated; instead, it is the essence of understanding, because it is through interaction that the speakers can display and achieve their shared understanding.

The differences in these basic assumptions lead to differences in research questions, methods and data selection. While this study is qualitative, SLA studies have basically used quantitative methods and elicited data. Because of statistical and quantitative interests, SLA researchers have gathered as data language samples which are carefully planned and controlled, but which do not concur to any dominant forms of interaction in the world. The interaction in SLA studies is often "an interaction designed to allow the NNS to produce a language sample" (Liddicoat 1997: 315). From an interactional perspective, this is problematic – interaction is not accepted as it is, as the participants' local achievement *in situ*. Furthermore, not only is this kind of conversation alienated from the interactional reality in the world, but it can also work against the aims of SLA research. Studies of SLA often explore and explicate ways to promote second language learning.[2] For example, there is a large body of literature on the (possible) benefits of what are called recasts for the speaker's language aquisition and use (see e.g. Long 1996; Mackey & Philp 1998; Mackey, Gass, & McDonough 2000). However, when Nicholas, Lightbown and Spada (2001) discussed the results of different recast studies in their review article, they noticed that "reacasts appear to be more useful input to learners in the laboratory setting than in the classroom setting" (ibid.: 749). Yet the laboratory studies also investigate recasts in order to find out whether recasts are a useful interactional tool that may promote learning (and thus could be used in language teaching).

Interactional practices cannot be separated from the activities they accomplish – they are interpreted in relation to the context in which they occur. In addition, interaction is not a stable unit which can be transferred from one environment to another. Linguistic practice that draws the learner's attention to an error in a test situation where the participants talk to each other only for the purpose of completing a task a researcher has given, might function differently in a real classroom situation or in naturally-occurring conversation where the participants also have other aims, and they are not primarily interacting with each other as a native speaker and a learner.

The (assumed) prominence of these linguistic identities – 'native speaker' and 'learner' – can thus be tied to the type of data in many SLA studies (NS-NNS pairs talking to each other because they are told to do so). Because of the test situations, speakers' nativeness or non-nativeness has been emphasized, and used to explain the linguistic behaviour of the speakers (cf. Firth & Wagner 1997). However, when second language speakers conduct their conversations with native speakers in everyday life, they have a much wider set of identities that can be activated in interaction; the speakers can be customers, clients, professionals, patients, etc. Evidence suggests that native and non-native speakers actually conduct their (non-pedagogic) conversations so as **not** to make their linguistic identities relevant (cf. Kurhila 2004; Brouwer, Rasmussen, & Wagner 2004; Wong 2004).

Recently, considerable debate and discussion have arisen about the tacit or open assumptions about language and language use in SLA research, the biases in its research agenda and the future prospects of the field (see e.g. Block 1996; Gregg, Long, Jordan, & Beretta 1997; Firth & Wagner 1997, 1998; Hall 1997; Kasper 1997; Larsen-Freeman 2000; Kramsch 2000; Atkinson 2002). Firth and Wagner (1997: 285–286) have pointed out that SLA research has a skewed view on discourse and communication, and Lantolf and Appel (1994: 11) state that SLA has a delimited and asocial view on language learning and learners. Atkinson (2002: 535–536) even refers to the SLA research as being surrealistic in its "present absence of human beings". He insists on treating the second language speakers "as real people, doing something they naturally do – not as mere sites for language acquisition" (ibid.: 539).

If the speakers are mainly treated as representing the categories of native and non-native speakers, then their "linguistic outcome" is often interpreted as reflecting these categories. For example, speech perturbations such as hesitations, restarts and repetitions, or unspecific utterances by the NNSs can be seen as reflecting their deficient mastery of the target language. However, speech perturbations and unspecific utterances are common in all kinds of real-life conversations, and can even serve interactional functions. Moreover, sometimes speech perturbations can be used to display the speaker's interactional competence rather than incompetence. I will exemplify this through a closer look at example (1):

(1) [replicated] Office. (V=client, S=secretary)

```
01 S: On-ko  tei-llä    laps-i-a?
      have-Q you.pl-ADE child-pl-PAR
      Do you have children?
02 P: J[o- on m Venäjä-lle  jä-i      [minä e-n
      y[e- have Russian-ALL stay-PST [I   NEG-1
      Y[e- I do m in Russia stayed   [I don't
       [                             [
03 S:  [Jos-                         [joo (.)
       [If-                          [yes (.)
04 P: ti[edä mi-tä    se (on).]
      kn[ow  what-PAR it (is) ]
      kn[ow what it (is).     ]
        [                     ]
05 S:   [maksa-tte-ko         ] hei-stä elatusa↑pu-a
        [pay-2pl-Q            ] they-ELA alimony-PAR
        [do you pay           ] alimony for them
06 P: Joo minä maksa-n mutt::a se: #ee# m:- m:i-tä se: se #öö#
      PRT I    pay-1   but     it           what-PAR it  it
      Yes I pay but:: it: #ee# w:- w:hat is: is #eh# it's not
07    ei #ö# (2.0) ei ole (.) papere-i-ta  [(.) sieltä
      NEG          NEG is     paper-pl-PAR [    there
      #eh# (2.0) there's no (.) papers (.) [from there
                                           [
08 S:                                      [↑Mm
09 P: koska   se on hehhh
      because it is hehhh
10 S: Just joo.   (.) maksatte epävirallises↑ti
      Okay right. (.) you pay  unofficial↑ly
11 P: Joo.
      Yes.
12 S: Jo[o  just
      Ye[ah right
        [
13 P:   [°Epävirallisesti°
        [°Unofficially°
```

I mentioned earlier that in this extract, the NNS displays some difficulty in formulating utterances or in finding lexical items. Indeed, the NNS's turn (lines 6–7) is rather fragmentary, containing several hesitation sounds, sound stretches, pauses and restarts. There is also the interrogative *mitä se* (on) 'what is (it)', which is reported as being a communication strategy (appeal for assistance) by the NNS (Tarone 1983: 62; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991: 127). The NNS could also be interpreted as using another communication strategy, circumlocution, i.e. describing the elements or characteristics of some action instead of using the appropriate target language structure (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991: 127). This is because he describes a characteristic of the action (that the payment is made without papers) instead of using the verb phrase, which the NS introduces a couple of turns later ('pay unofficially', line 10).

However, the (main) reason for the speaker's difficulty need not be his nonnativeness, and his hesitations and "circumlocation" do not necessarily reflect restrictions in his knowledge of the target language. It is illuminating to look at the fragmentary utterance (lines 6–7, 9) in light of its conversational location: the turn is also the NNS's answer to a question about his economic situation in relation to his children. The action the NNS is describing – paying alimony unofficially – probably would not be easy to explain for a native client, either. Divorce and alimony arrangements are private and very personal issues, but they are also institutionalized and involve technical language. The arrangements after a divorce are indicative of the person's relationships and his economic situation and, hence, reflect his ability to be a competent member in society. It should also be noted that the alimony is paid outside the official procedure. This makes the activity, not perhaps directly criminal, but at least somewhat suspect. Reporting an unofficial (i.e. non-institutional) arrangement to someone who represents an institution (albeit not the same type) is probably at least not facilitating the task. Therefore, the turn by the NNS could be seen as expressing a delicate matter. Delicacy and talking about delicate issues have been investigated in conversation between native speakers (Silverman 1994; Linell & Bredmar 1996). Signs of delicacy are speech perturbations – self-repairs and delays. Another indication observed to imply delicacy is laughter (cf. line 9), for it displays an affective stance towards performing the activity (Haakana 1999: 172; see also Jefferson, Sacks, & Schegloff 1987; Jefferson 1984). Thus, when having trouble in formulating the answer, the NNS is not necessarily only struggling with his linguistic restrictions. He is also constructing the turn as being delicate, as concerning matters which are commonly experienced as difficult to talk about.

In other words, the "communication strategies" in the above example need not be produced to compensate, or not solely to compensate, the speaker's deficient language skills. By hesitating and using circumlocation, the NNS can construct a special relationship between what he says and how he says it; he can display his cultural competence and knowledge about delicate activities. A microanalytic reading of this excerpt reveals that it would be hasty to explain the speech perturbations by the NNS by citing his status as a not-yet-competent speaker of the language. A valid analysis of the NNS's turns and activities (i.e. of his speech) cannot be given without taking into account the context in which the speech is produced.

To make my position clear, I am not suggesting that the cognitively-oriented work in SLA should be replaced by interactionally-oriented work. While a conversation analytic perspective can offer new insights into the data that have been examined using quantitative methods, it does not address the issues central in traditional SLA research, namely the development of the speaker's use of particular linguistic structures. However, although conversation analysis has not been the method to analyse the longitudinal process of language learning, it is well suited to investigate interactional instances which may be relevant for language learning – instances where participants need to negotiate, check or clarify meanings in order to achieve a shared understanding. Also, examining speakers' linguistic behaviour – what do the native and non-native speakers focus on while producing and receiving utterances, what do they correct in their own or in the other's linguistic outcome and how – will offer new insights into the notion of profiency and provide information that can be exploited when developing teaching methods and curriculum to better respond to the challenges posed by real-life interaction. I therefore urge us to consider what the interactional view can bring to the research of second language.

An interactional approach can be fruitful to SLA research in several ways.[3] First, by exploring naturally-occurring conversations, interactionally-oriented research can avoid the inherent problems arising in the test situations. In CA, the object of the study is the speaker's conduct in "real life" and not a result from the experiment itself (on "doing being an interactional guinea-pig", see Wagner 1998). This book thus sheds light on the participants' "normal" ways to correct, clarify or confirm each other's utterances, when the language is a vehicle for interaction and not the focus of it.

Second, a microanalytic reading of the conversational excerpts can challenge, or at least specify, the classification of the speakers' linguistic conduct. Categories such as 'indicators of non-understanding', 'comprehension checks', 'clarification requests' and 'conversational continuants' (cf. e.g. Long 1983; Varonis & Gass 1985) can be rather vague; the basis for drawing the boundaries between different categories is usually not discussed at any length in

SLA studies. Indeed, Varonis and Gass note this difficulty when exploring a model for the negotiation of meaning. They argue (1985: 82) that "in many instances a particular example is ambiguous with regard to whether it is truly an example of a conversational continuant or whether it is an indicator of non-understanding". More recently, Foster, Tonkin and Wigglesworth (2000: 357) have criticised the SLA literature for categorising different utterances into groups without discussing any criteria for this grouping. A microanalytic, context-sensitive reading of the examples can offer a more fine-grained analysis of the turns – of their structure, function, and sequential location.

Third, following from the two previous points, an interactional approach offers a new way to consider the level of achievement in interaction. That is, aspects such as the (grammatical) correctness of speech and the need to achieve a mutually accepted understanding on the matters being discussed may be different when people are participating in an experiment where a specific predefined task is to be completed, than when people are interacting in a real life situation (cf. McNamara 1997). In experiments, the tasks to be completed are defined by the analyst. In real life situations, in particular in institutional encounters, the conversations have an "external" aim – a form to be completed, an exam to be taken, a fee to be paid, etc. In this way, the participants have a real need to reach a shared understanding, so that the purpose of the conversation, the institutional goal, can be achieved. Therefore, the participants cannot for example abandon the message totally (cf. e.g. Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991: 127). If they want to achieve their (institutional) goals, they have to come to a common understanding of what they are talking about.

Finally, as a consequence of the previous points, interactional analysis makes it possible to treat the participants' linguistic identities (as natives or non-natives) as a dynamic category. In other words, the relevance of the speakers' nativeness or non-nativeness need not be taken as given, as automatically consequential for the interaction. Since the research setting does not presuppose a relevance of the speaker's identity, it can be investigated as a dynamic factor, alive to the changes in the course of the conversation. The participants can but need not make their speaker identities salient in interaction.

To summarise, this book on interaction between native and non-native speakers is methodologically and conceptually different from most SLA research that is concerned with interaction and comprehension. This study is rooted in the interactional view on language and it is distinctive among the traditional SLA studies in the ways mentioned above.

1.4 The organisation and the relevance of the study

As mentioned previously, the focus of this book is on interactional understanding, which is manifested in the progression of conversation. I will begin by outlining the conversation analytical view on understanding, after which I will present repair organisation – the interactants' mechanism to establish, maintain and remedy understanding in conversation.

The analytical chapters of this study are arranged so as to shed light on the instances where the progress of conversation is (or could be) disrupted. In Chapters 3 and 5, it is the other (i.e. the recipient) who shifts focus onto something in the prior talk. In Chapter 4, it is the self (i.e. the speaker) who disrupts the talk in-progress by beginning to search for a word (or other linguistic unit). The difference between Chapters 3 and 5 lies in the status of the turns that shift focus to prior talk. Chapter 3 presents turns in which the speaker replaces a grammatically, most often morphologically, anomalous utterance with a version closer to the standard. Chapter 5 focuses on turns in which the speaker reformulates a stretch of prior talk. These turns involve lexico-semantically more substantial changes than the turns in Chapter 3.

In terms of repair, Chapter 3 focuses on other-correction, Chapter 4 on self-initiated repair, and Chapter 5 on candidate understandings, which have been classified as other-initiated repair (Schegloff et al. 1977: 368). These phenomena are distributed so that other-correction is performed solely by the NSs, word searches (where the other speaker is invited to join in) almost solely by the NNSs, and reformulations somewhat more frequently by the NSs (the numbers are given in respective chapters).

This study has a bearing on several areas of research. First, it contributes to our knowledge of interactional practices, in particular in cases where some doubt exists about the level of the intersubjectivity between the participants. Second, this study expands the traditional research agenda of both CA and second language research, in the way some researchers have suggested (e.g. Hatch 1978: 403; Firth & Wagner 1997: 285–286; McNamara 1997: 459; Wong 2000a: 261). By so doing, the present study builds a bridge between ethnomethodological and linguistic approaches, and paves the way for new, a more interactionally attuned and context-sensitive perspective on second language speech. Third, and within CA, this analysis contributes to our knowledge of institutional interaction, of the linguistic practices which are used to constitute an office encounter. Finally, a detailed micro-level analysis of interaction between native and non-native speakers adds to our knowledge of the questions that are central in second language acquisition research, such as when and how the non-native speakers' "linguistic output" is modified by themselves or by the native speakers, or when the non-native speakers display uptake after these modifications.

CHAPTER 2

Repair organisation as a means to construct understanding

2.1 Interactional understanding and repair organisation

In this chapter, I will discuss repair organisation which is a resource for the interactants to address a variety of problems in conversation (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977). First, I will relate the repair system to the conversation analytic perspective on understanding, and then I will discuss the distinctions in the repair organisation in light of second language data.

In conversation analytic thinking, understanding and interaction are inseparable – understanding is a continuous, dynamic process, which is constructed and modified in and through interaction. In CA, the existence of mutual understanding is not an "in-principle" problem, as it is in many philosophy-based approaches (see e.g. Taylor 1992). Instead, shared understanding is treated as the expected state of affairs between the interlocutors. However, as Taylor (1992: 217) observes, the trust that our interlocutors interpret our interaction as we do is of the nature of working hypothesis; the assumption holds only "until further notice". The speaker trusts that the recipient understands her until the recipient behaves in such a way so as to contradict that assumption. The speaker's trust can be shattered only by "public" events – events which are displayed in interaction so that the speaker, and therefore also the researcher, can observe them.

The core notion behind this "public display of understanding" is intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is based on the sequential architecture of interaction; linked actions are the basic building blocks of intersubjectivity (Heritage 1984a: 256; see also Schegloff 1992: 1295–1300). This means that an actor's response to another actor's behaviour will be taken as indicating understanding of that behaviour (Kalin 1995: 36). According to Heritage (1984a: 255), the point is: