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INSIGHT INTO CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION BARRIERS FROM THE
PERSPECTIVE OF CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

BY

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ABSTRACT:

This research is designed with the intention of more deeply exploring the concept of cross-cultural communication barriers that have been recently looked upon mostly from the perspective of obvious larger cultural differences such as social norms defined by customs and traditions. A crucial facet of this study is drawing attention to the necessity of concretely defining the difference between the terms “language barriers” and “cross-cultural barriers” that are often, and arguably erroneously, used interchangeably, thus limiting their precision. Using linguistic and conversation analysis, this study looks at interactions between different groups of English speakers with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds and observes the breakdowns in communication. The chosen approach of analyzing the intercultural interaction on the micro-level by spotting the sequential patterns and zooming in at the parts of the data where participants show signs of misunderstanding led to identifying three main ways in which cross-cultural barriers manifest themselves, namely the appearance of irrelevant turn, lack of recipient design, and unsuccessful collaborative completion.

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Introduction

Intercultural communication is a highly productive field of study that is tasked with discovering ways to facilitate effective cross-cultural interactions, mutual understanding, and respect in the contemporary, diverse and polarized world. The challenge of explaining the relationship between language and culture continues to be widely investigated by researchers. Artificial languages are being created in isolation from specific cultures in order to see how words can function on the level of concepts detached from the cultural meaning. In recent years, researchers have increasingly turned from a theoretical study of intercultural communication to more empirical approaches, focusing on social interactions in intercultural settings.

The purpose of this research is to study the interaction between native and non-native English speakers in order to see how the speakers' language usage and behavior change based on the cultural background of the person they interact with. While conducting this study, we are hoping to shed new light to the following research questions:

- How does the difference in cultural background manifest itself in the interaction between native and non-native speakers?
- What sort of communication barrier appears between speakers who can speak the same language but do not share a common cultural background?
- How do speakers overcome this barrier?

Developing balanced bilingualism in adulthood is a long and complicated process that provides a fertile breeding ground for exploring the peculiarities of acquiring not only the second language but also the corresponding foreign culture. Analyzing and comparing interactions between young adults with different levels of bilingualism happening in set

conditions will help to identify how cross-cultural communication barriers affect interaction. Bilingual children have an advantage in becoming balanced bilinguals as they simultaneously work on developing communicative and cultural competence in both languages. Adults learning a second language face much more difficulties when it comes to foreign language learning, but at the same time, they become “transmitters of their native culture” for the speakers of their foreign language. Nowadays the common belief is that the earlier a person starts learning a foreign language, the better, which makes a lot of adults discouraged about learning a second language. Analysis of interactions between Russian-English bilinguals having different language learning experiences with native English speakers having different backgrounds in the Russian culture might open a new perspective on how language and culture barriers should be approached. Currently language learners are considered to be responsible for cultural adjustment to the conversation in the foreign language and misunderstanding in the conversation is seen as a result of a language learner’s failure to communicate their ideas. By the means of conversation analysis, it would become possible to highlight positive aspects of language and culture barriers in communication as well as see how the interaction changes based on the cultural background of the participants.

Literature Review

Many eminent researchers have explored the process of intercultural communication from different perspectives, as they realized the importance of deepening the current understanding of ways in which different cultures are similar and different (Bennett, 2017; Carbaugh, 2007; Scollon, 2004; Spitzberg, 2000).

In recent years, researchers have increasingly turned from a theoretical study of intercultural communication to more empirical approaches, focusing on linguistic

interactions in intercultural settings. Specifically, researchers have analyzed non-verbal features, linguistic competence, and the interactional dynamics that occur among culturally shaped communication practices (Bailey, 2000; Carbaugh, 2007; Milburn, 2000; Scollo, 2004; Wilkins, 2005; Witteborn, 2003). This vision of the interaction happening in the intercultural setting is shared by many other scholars and demonstrates the signs of re-focusing the studies in the field of intercultural communication in a more practical direction.

American sociologist Milton Bennett, founding director and CEO of the Intercultural Development Research Institute (IDR Institute), has also made a significant contribution in the field by adding more structure to the existing framework through his research. Bennett's works (1998, 2017) demonstrate the benefits of focusing research on face-to-face (or at least person-to-person) interaction as well as suggests that researchers should pay closer attention to how cultural differences are likely to affect face-to-face interaction as findings in this field would help to form the essential basis for facilitating more effective intercultural interactions.

All aforementioned ideas facilitated a slight, but necessary change in the essence of intercultural approach by supporting the understanding of intercultural interaction as a combination of inseparable features related to different fields of study. This new perspective justifies the importance of looking at the intercultural communication from a wider angle, which implies researching the concept on the interdisciplinary level. This is the point underscored in the work by R. Scollon and S.W. Scollon: “‘intercultural communication’ and ‘cross-cultural communication’ are problematical in relationship to discourse analysis in that they have developed out of a conceptually wider range of disciplines including anthropology, sociology, social psychology, speech communication,

management or business communication, and even international political science” (Scollon and Scollon, 2001, p. 539). D. Carbaugh seems to agree with them in terms of the significance of using a broader lens of analysis to characterize the process of communication. He draws the attention of the scholarly community to conducting research focusing on exploring “what is getting done when people communicate, with these various accomplishments being linked to issues of identity, action, emotion, relationships, and dwelling in nature” (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 169).

Cross-Cultural Barriers: A wall or a ladder?

Cross-cultural communication is often associated with misunderstanding, difficulty in getting a message across, and speakers’ frustration caused by the inability to leap over the wall built with differences in communication style and perception. At the turn of the 21st century, researchers in the field of intercultural communication saw their main purpose in finding a way to teach people to communicate effectively with representatives of different cultures and to embrace their otherness, as they understood the importance of creating a firm theoretical framework for cross-cultural communication in the context of globalization. The first half of the 20th century witnessed two world wars and numerous international conflicts, the terrifying results of which proved the importance of cooperation between nations not only on the intergovernmental level, but also at the level of individual intercultural exchange in the context of everyday life. Educating people about different cultures with their unique values and traditions and creating the opportunities for them to get cross-cultural experience are still seen as necessary steps towards avoiding dangerous escalation on the global arena.

The undeniable inter-linkage between one’s language and their culture attests to the inevitability of facing a communication barrier in a potential interaction with an individual

who does not share the same native language and culture. E. Sapir and B. L. Whorf are the prime representatives of the transdisciplinary area of cognitive linguistics, sociology, and anthropology highlighting that one's language shapes the way they think and experience the world around them. Whorf argued that studying languages is the first step towards broadening one's worldview. He admitted that nobody is "free to describe nature with absolute impartiality," however, "a linguist familiar with very many widely different linguistic systems" would be the closest to achieving this unattainable goal (Whorf, 1956, p. 214). Sidnell and Enfield pointed out that Whorf's understanding of language mirroring the way people think explains the reason why we study human diversity, which is, "to know more about the ways we can think and about the kinds of social systems we can live in...to know more about the human potential for action" (Sidnell and Enfield, 2012, p.312). This idea leads to the thought that intercultural communication is a complicated phenomenon due to the absence of common cultural ground constituted by concepts from the shared native language. This section of the literature review is a purposeful attempt to come to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication barriers that were recognized by researchers for their problematic nature but are lacking a thorough overview of their structure and characteristics. Re-focusing on the phenomenon itself rather than on the ways to handle its negative outcomes could potentially show new ways of increasing the efficiency of intercultural interactions.

Observing the usage of such terms as "communication barriers," "language barriers," "cultural barriers," and "cross-cultural barriers" has shown that there are no strict borders imposed when it comes to talking about obstacles that people face in the process of communication. By using these terms interchangeably, researchers contribute to creating a confusing image of these concepts, which is why it is necessary to distinguish between

“cross-cultural barriers,” “language barriers,” and “communication barriers.” Applying the aforementioned terms irregularly causes a situation where there is no formal and precise definitions for any of these terms, but all of them are understood as a combination of obstacles in communication across cultures that can be overcome with the help of cultural knowledge and a specific set of skills. The problem is that such a general understanding of these terms causes serious oversimplification of understanding regarding the phenomena, which is why drawing a dividing line between these types of barriers would be beneficial, as it would help to re-focus on specific problems and avoid overgeneralization of communication-related issues.

Several decades of research in the field of intercultural communication draws the general public’s attention to the high probability of failing to achieve positive communicative outcomes during cross-cultural interactions (Dodd, 1995; Hall, 1976; Kim, 1986; Martin, 1993; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). These researchers came to the agreement that achieving successful intercultural understanding is hardly possible without making an intentional attempt to overcome language barriers, adapt to the unfamiliar customs and practices, and adjust to cultural variations in verbal and nonverbal communication (Dodd, 1995; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Kim, 1986; Wiseman & Koester, 1993; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). The complexity of the communication barriers that appear in the intercultural communication setting have encouraged researchers to divide the differences that could potentially cause communication breakdowns into three groups: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Spencer-Rodgers, McGovern, 2002). Differences in cognition include fundamental epistemologies, values, and norms; differences in affect unified factors related to emotional expressivity; and finally, language, customs, and communication styles were put into the

category of differences in patterns of behavior. Analyzing the nature of differences causing cross-cultural communication barriers has allowed researchers to conclude that the combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioral (including linguistic) adaptations is the keystone to effective intercultural communication (Dodd, 1995; Gudykunst, 1986; Lustig & Koester, 1996; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002).

Such a general classification of the obstacles that could potentially influence an intercultural interaction caused unnecessary oversimplification of the vision of the concept. The term “cross-cultural communication barriers” has gradually become self-explanatory, while the negative connotation around it kept growing due to the context in which the concept is always mentioned. For instance, J. Spencer-Rodgers and T. McGovern, who analyzed the psychological impact of cross-cultural communication barriers on intergroup attitudes, pointed out that linguistic and cultural barriers extend their influence beyond the level of individual intercultural interactions by creating a breeding ground for evaluative and affective consequences for interactants in an intercultural context. They state: “the repeated communication failures and emotionally laden cultural misunderstandings can give rise to a negative evaluative orientation toward the culturally different” (Spencer-Rodgers, McGovern, 2002, p. 610-611). Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern’s idea is supported by numerous researchers from the late 20th century, who associated communicating with the culturally different with a range of negative factors such as unfavorable emotional responses (awkwardness and anxiety) (Stephan & Stephan, 1985), feelings of impatience and frustration (Dodd, 1995; Giles & Robinson, 1990; Wiseman & Koester, 1993), difficulties related to the processing of accented speech (Yook & Albert, 1999), and unfair assumptions about non-native speakers (Edwards, 1982).

In more recent research on intercultural communication the term “cross-cultural barriers” is often mentioned to address general difficulties and misunderstandings appearing during the interactions involving representatives of different cultures. This encourages researchers to switch their attention from explaining the problem of cross-cultural barriers to finding the solution for this problem, which is why recent research in the field of cross-cultural communication is built around such ideas as “intercultural competence” (Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018), “intercultural sensitivity” (Bennett, 2017), “intercultural awareness” (Baker, 2015), and “cultural intelligence” (Thomas, 2015). All of the aforementioned concepts are introduced to systematize the conditions and requirements that should be fulfilled so that interactants can come to a mutual understanding in a cross-cultural interaction setting. Thus, the route that is currently chosen for developing an understanding of encounters in the intercultural communication setting leads us to focusing on the skills, knowledge, and personal qualities that one needs to possess in order to deal with obstacles related to cross-cultural communication effectively. The benefits of this theoretical framework include practicality, versatility, systemic approach, and a wide scope of analysis. However, several drawbacks of this particular lens can be observed.

First, the level of generalization that this approach entails does not allow establishing connections or relationships between the specific cultural backgrounds of the interactants and the course of their encounter. The focus of research exploring intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, and intercultural awareness is on the necessity of nurturing universal communicators, global citizens who would be able to adjust to the course of any intercultural encounter by using their skills and knowledge. This idea certainly appears attractive and promising; however, it would be just as beneficial bringing

the analysis down to the level of individual interactions in a specific intercultural setting. Combining findings received with the help of a more general approach with observations made in the process of detail-oriented analysis could be very effective.

Second, by promoting the idea of the “global citizen” the researchers leave the concept of cultural distance without attention, even though it is hardly plausible that the process of developing intercultural competence and sensitivity would be exactly the same for people coming from different ends of the spectrum in terms of cultural distance. The term “cultural distance” described by J. W. Berry (1997) implies that different combinations of two cultures will have a different degree of dissimilarity in their beliefs and practices (Arnett, 2002, p. 779).

The important questions that arise here are, “Where do we draw the line between communication barriers and cross-cultural communication barriers? What is the relationship between these two terms?” The problem related to these two questions is that there are no clear guidelines on how one can identify an interaction as “cross-cultural.” R. Jenifer and G. Raman state that “cross-cultural communication barriers such as anxiety, uncertainty, stereotyping, and ethnocentrism are caused by inadequate cultural knowledge and the lack of intercultural communicative skills” (Jenifer & Raman, 2015, p. 348). There are several problems regarding this statement being used to define the concept of cross-cultural barriers.

Firstly, it reinforces the aforementioned vagueness and negativity around the term instead of giving an objective explanation of what this kind of communication barrier entails. Also, by listing anxiety, uncertainty, stereotyping, and ethnocentrism as types of cross-cultural communication barriers, they add an extra level of complexity to the term by overgeneralizing it, which creates the illusion that any issue related to the process of

communication can be described as a kind of cross-cultural barrier. Stereotyping, anxiety, and uncertainty cannot be narrowed down to the context of cross-cultural communication only. Stereotyping is a complex phenomenon that can manifest itself within a single culture, meaning that people can face a problem of stereotyping while communicating with individuals who share the same ethnocultural background. Stereotyping can be based on the characteristics not related to one's ethnic origin such as gender, profession, appearance, etc. A similar argument can be made about using anxiety and uncertainty to characterize cross-cultural communication barriers. Individuals can experience anxiety and uncertainty in many different communication settings (e.g. talking to a medical professional, job interviews), which means assigning these negative labels to cross-cultural communication alone is unfair. Thus, the aforementioned statement characterizing cross-cultural barriers is a good example of the term being defined from a purely subjective standpoint: the concept is described by highlighting common problems that one could possibly encounter in cross-cultural interactions. In order to get closer to a more objective understanding of the concept of cross-cultural communication barriers, it would be beneficial to start with defining the concept of culture. Culture can be defined as "a learned meaning system that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, meanings, and symbols that are passed down from one generation to the next and are shared by varying degrees by interacting members of a community" (Ryan, 2010, p. 215, Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 28). Such a holistic perspective on culture allows a lot of room for interpretation. Traditionally, one's cultural background was viewed in relation to a specific place where the individual comes from, however due to a high level of geographical mobility and technological advances in the modern age, cultures cannot be considered tightly connected with any specific physical space. One's native language is still seen as a main indicator

pointing to the ethnic culture that the individual belongs to; however, by its definition the term “culture” exceeds the scope of ethnic culture as there are multiple examples of situations when people share the same native language but have different traditions, beliefs, and values. For example, people from many different countries speak English or French natively, but they do not necessarily share the same traditions, values, and beliefs. This is why the problem of defining a cross-cultural interaction has a significant level of ambiguity around it: people coming from the same country do not necessarily share the same language, values, or beliefs; and even people speaking the same language natively do not necessarily identify themselves as representatives of the same culture.

The interesting part about the definition of culture is that as a meaning system, culture can be “shared by varying degrees,” which signifies that an individual can possibly share several cultures to different degrees. This reveals the danger of surrounding cross-cultural communication with the aura of skepticism and negativity. Next, we are going to look at the statement that is used to characterize cross-cultural communication barriers as a phenomenon, even though the specific difficulties described cannot be narrowed down to the intercultural communication context only:

Cross-cultural communication continually involves misunderstanding caused by misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation. When the sender of a message comes from one culture and the receiver from another, the chances of accurately transmitting a message are low. Foreigners see, interpret, and evaluate things differently, and consequently act upon them differently (Adler, 2003, p.2).

The details given in this statement do not serve the purpose of distinguishing cross-cultural communication barriers from language barriers or general communication barriers. Misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation are common problems in

communication that can be caused by a multitude of factors, which means that one should not assume that communication obstacles occurring during an intercultural interaction appear only due to the cultural differences between the interactants. It is important to take into account that interactants' emotional state, competency regarding the topic of the conversation, and listening skills would contribute to the problem of misunderstanding as well, even though these factors are not related to the individual's cultural background.

The way cross-cultural communication barriers are presented in the examples analyzed above justifies the necessity of drawing a dividing line between different types of communication barriers. If stereotyping does not take place in every cross-cultural interaction, it would be incorrect to assume that stereotyping defines the barriers that appear in an intercultural communication setting. If people speaking the same language natively can still encounter cross-cultural barriers, it is important to highlight the ways in which a language barrier is different from a cross-cultural barrier. And finally, misunderstanding, miscommunication, and other communication-related obstacles can be a part of an interaction that involves people sharing the same language and culture, which is why it is necessary to differentiate between barriers that appear due to the cultural differences and situations when communication breakdown is caused by different circumstances preventing individuals from encoding/decoding their message effectively. Therefore, it cannot be presupposed that all the difficulties that appear in a cross-cultural communication setting should be referred to cross-cultural communication barriers, as this vision contributes to creating a negative image around cultural otherness. Individuals' age, education level, income level, personality, and lifestyle can cause as much difficulty for effective communication even though these factors are not considered a part of one's cultural background.

It is important that the definition of “cross-cultural barriers” is specific enough, so that there is no confusion about the source of a specific obstacle that occurs in an intercultural interaction. Communication breakdowns (cases of misunderstanding and miscommunication) appear in everyday communication frequently, however they are generally seen as routine communication issues that people can naturally resolve through the conversation. Because miscommunication, misunderstanding, and communication breakdowns exceed the limits of cross-cultural interaction, cross-cultural barriers should not be explained with these terms only and their definition needs to be further narrowed down to address obstacles that are unique to the context of cross-cultural communication.

The first step towards generating a more detailed vision of each specific type of communicative obstacle is to see how successful interaction is commonly understood in relevant literature. Researchers following the constructionists’ approach to communication tend to describe the situation of successful communication as reaching a “mutually acceptable outcome rather than the total match of participants’ speaker meanings and listener interpretations” (Kasper, 1997, p. 348; Olsina, 2002; Korkut et al., 2018). Consequently, the term “miscommunication” is used to refer to “all instances of observable communication difficulties in the interaction” (Olsina, 2002, p. 38-39). The constructionists’ point of view comes into conflict with the understanding of miscommunication promoted by the information transfer model of communication (Wagner, 1996) based on Saussure’s language processing model. Researchers supporting this model state that communication is successful only if the message encoded by the sender and the message decoded by the receiver are absolutely identical (Gass & Varonis 1991; Bazanella & Damiano 1999). While analyzing these two approaches and comparing them with each other, one can notice that the information transfer model tangentially

promotes the idea that intercultural interaction is fundamentally different from an interaction happening between individuals who share the same cultural background. This theoretical framework focuses on the alignment of a pair of meanings: one that the sender implies and the other one that the receiver decodes. Projecting this vision of successful communication on cross-cultural interaction implies that it is rather unlikely that mutual understanding will be reached as a communicative outcome in this situation. Even though the interactants communicate in the same language, one of the individuals will filter their understanding through the prism of their native language, which means that semantic, syntactic, and sociocultural properties of the language would likely distort the original message and in this case the two messages would not perfectly align with each other.

Conversely, the constructionist's vision of successful communication is an attempt to equate intercultural interaction with any other interaction that does not involve an additional level of meaning created by cultural otherness. According to this framework, meaning is not constructed by the speakers individually, but "rather negotiated, dynamically produced, and jointly constructed by speakers in situated interaction" (Olsina, 2002, p. 39). I believe that this dynamic understanding of meaning and successful communication should be a starting point for approaching the complicated phenomenon of cross-cultural interaction. By admitting that understanding does not necessarily imply being in the same mindset as an interlocutor, we would promote a more flexible interpretation of the cross-cultural interactions. Instead of coming from the idea that two messages shape and direct the interaction, we can look at the communication process as two people working together on creating the third message that could be different from the initial messages the speakers kept in mind, but can still be considered as a successful communicative outcome as long as the interactants find it acceptable. The main benefit of

using this fundamental idea as a basis for defining the term “cross-cultural communication barriers” is that it does not imply that an additional cultural background is a source of distortion of the original message in an intercultural communication setting. Instead it encourages us to focus on the communicative mechanisms helping interactants co-construct meaning and find a common denominator.

Another important step towards clearly identifying the difference between language barriers, cross-cultural barriers, and communication barriers is to look at the sources of misunderstanding in more detail. According to Garand (2009) there are three categories of misunderstanding: pragmatic, semantic, and discursive. The first category is related to how the interactants use the context of the conversation to form their general expectations and attitudes toward one other. The second category is strictly linguistic in nature: it refers to the interpretation of linguistic units. Finally, the last category deals with cognitive breaks that depend on how interlocutors carry out their arguments in discourse (Korkut, Dolmaci & Karaca, 2018).

The aforementioned categorization of types of misunderstanding can serve as a basis for a more well-defined classification of communication barriers. Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship between the three types of communication barriers that can manifest themselves within the same interaction. This classification also highlights that these terms cannot be used interchangeably as each of them address a specific area of meaning co-construction. Language barriers can be traced to semantic misunderstanding, meaning they appear when speakers encounter a problem of finding precise words to express their thoughts. The severity of language barriers can vary depending on the interlocutor’s linguistic competence. General communication barriers include obstacles in communication related to the overall context of the interaction and such factors as

emotional state of interactants. Finally, cross-cultural barriers could be narrowed down to the communicative difficulties that cause pragmatic misunderstanding, meaning that they stem from the cultural differences in the ways people think, express their ideas, and perceive verbal and non-verbal cues.

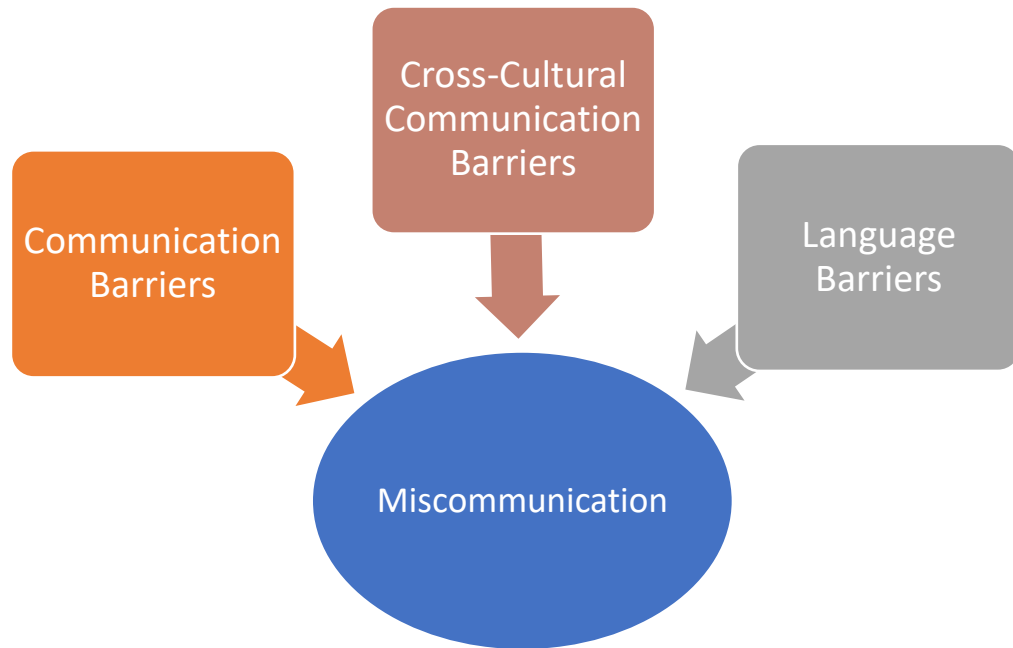


Figure 1. Classification of Communication Barriers

The tightly intertwined relationship between language and culture contribute to the vagueness around the different types of communication barriers that appear during the interaction. Every culture is dissolved in the language of its representatives and the language helps people transmit their culture. Such a vision of these two fundamental concepts being in “symbiosis” with each other encourages the researchers to look at language and culture as an integrated whole without looking in detail at what each of them brings to the communication process. When it comes to studying the communicative disruption in the context of a cross-cultural interaction, it is crucial to distinguish between language and cross-cultural barriers, because even though people may speak the same

language, it often does not mean that they project the same culture into the conversation. As a system of signs and sounds used for the purpose of communication, language can function outside of any cultural context quite successfully, which is why acquiring a second language to the extent when one would be able to do simple everyday communicative tasks is quite plausible. In this case, learning language could be seen as an equivalent to learning basic math skills: one putting words in a certain order to achieve a desired outcome as though following a specific formula to achieve a specified numerical result. However, the clear image of a language as a system gets blurred as soon as the language usage itself gets influenced by the individual's culture, which is why it is especially interesting to observe this influence in the cross-cultural communication setting when the same language can be influenced by two or more different cultures at the same time. This is when language and culture, which was first though inseparable, can be torn apart, which means that the communicative interruptions rooted in the language should be observed separately from the communicative difficulties caused by the presence of another culture. Language as a system functions more on this mathematical basis where the expectation is that if all the units needed are applied in the proper order by a speaker, their intended conversation can happen. In this sense language barriers are referring to the breaking down in the semantic units, whereas cross-cultural barriers are referring to a breakdown in the actual communication itself, even though all necessary semantic units are present.

Our cultural experiences play a major role in forming our way of thinking and viewing everyday situations, which is why cross-cultural communication barriers are more subtle and harder to observe in comparison with language barriers. Cross-cultural barriers do not appear because of differences in pronunciation or vocabulary range, they occur when native speakers are forced to step out of their pragmatic comfort zone (associated

with mundane day-to-day interaction) by non-native speakers who introduce their “foreign” way of thinking into the interaction. It is commonly thought that cross-cultural barriers are very tangible and easy to track down as they take place when the two opposite cultures collide during an interaction, in which case it becomes hard to reach an understanding. One of the reasons why this vision of cross-cultural barriers became common lies in the difference-oriented approach that is often chosen to study this phenomenon. For instance, the researcher notices an aspect of communication that could potentially cause a disruption in communication between the representatives of these two cultures and studies that particular aspect to demonstrate how exactly the difference in the culturally-expected social behavior affects the process of communication between the representatives of these particular cultures. As a result, cross-cultural communication barriers are associated with cultural differences that are manifested in people’s behavior: different expectations for personal space; different conventional ways to greet each other and start the conversation; different understanding of politeness; different conventions for topics that can and cannot be discussed in the conversation. Studying these aforementioned aspects makes a significant contribution towards developing a better understanding of different cultures. However, because they are mainly concentrated on the macro level of the interaction, they make us believe that in order to avoid communication interference of a cross-cultural nature it is sufficient to adjust our behavior to fit better within the foreign culture. On the contrary, the idea behind this research is to focus on the micro level of the interaction and study cross-cultural communication barriers by comparing the interactions between native speakers of the same cultural background with the intercultural interactions where one of the interlocutors is a second language learner.

Using Conversation Analysis to Study the Concept of Cross-Cultural Barriers

In the previous section of this literature review, the problematic issues around a broad understanding of cross-cultural barriers were discussed and a more narrow definition of the phenomenon was suggested. The importance of using a more dynamic approach to setting the criteria for successful communication was highlighted and justified. The constructionist's idea that meaning cannot be represented as a fixed message in the individual's mind, but rather should be seen as a message co-constructed by the interlocutors during the interaction brings us to a discussion of conversation analysis as a theoretical framework and methodological tool that can be used to describe and analyze the complicated phenomenon of different types of communication barriers, including the case of cross-cultural communication barriers.

The advantage of using conversation analysis as a methodological paradigm to approach this concept is that it allows us to focus on the part of the interaction that is hard for the speakers to control. This type of research design helps us see the other side of the intercultural interaction; namely, difficulties of pragmatic nature that representatives of different cultures are able to overcome by contributing to the interaction until shared understanding is reached. Shared understanding in this case can be seen as a positive outcome of the intercultural interaction that is beneficial for both speakers: this is the reason why cross-cultural communication barriers should be seen rather as a necessity than an issue that needs a radical solution. By facing cross-cultural communication barriers and overcoming them individuals broaden their pragmatic horizons and train their mind be more open to new perspectives. Thus, conversation analysis emphasizes an interesting and rather philosophical question regarding cross-cultural communication barriers: would eradicating cross-cultural communication barriers do more harm than good? Of course, this

study is not intended to give a definitive answer to this question, but it certainly shows a more optimistic perspective on the issue. By viewing the outcome of cross-cultural interaction as a mutual responsibility of both interlocutors instead of perceiving “cultural otherness” as a flaw, this research shows that facing certain types of cultural misunderstanding could be a learning experience for both native and non-native speakers.

A firm understanding of the background of Conversation Analysis (which will be referred to as CA for the duration of this literature review) and its roots is necessary to see the benefits of using this particular method to study cross-cultural communication barriers. The foundation of this methodology has been facilitated by the expansion of various new schools of thought within the social sciences in the mid-twentieth century. Particularly, there were noticeable changes related to how scholars chose to approach studies in the field of sociology. Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman showed “the growing disenchantment with the dominant, normal-science strains of postwar sociology” in his early books. While sociologists were searching for alternative approaches, Goffman certainly offered a new perspective. He shifted his focus of research from the larger scale of communication as a macrocosm to the microcosm of everyday interaction. Analyzing real-life conversations, Goffman highlighted the importance of some of the aspects of interaction that were previously overlooked; for example, “emotional tones that [govern] interaction” (Goffman, 2005, p. 10). In his approach, Goffman explained the major potential of looking at the language not just from the linguistic point of view but through the lens of sociology. He emphasized that interaction is not purely built with the help of linguistic tools, but that there are useful interactional mechanisms that help an actor to accomplish certain actions (Goffman 2005, p. 9). This fundamental idea proposed by Goffman is interesting in regards to studying the cross-cultural communication barriers, as

it highlights that language is not the only factor affecting how the interaction unfolds, which supports a vision of communication barriers appearing at two main levels of the interaction: linguistic and socio-cultural.

In addition to Goffman's work, the idea of action-based interaction was reinforced by other scholars as well. J. L. Austin, a British philosopher of language and one of the more significant representatives of ordinary language philosophy, introduced the term "illocutionary act" to linguistics. In his book, titled "How to Do Things with Words" (1962), he argues that by uttering sentences in a natural language, a speaker performs an action, a speech act. In the article "Meaning, intentionality and Communication" P. Jacob emphasizes that it is important to distinguish between an act of speech and a speech act, which might seem to be similar concepts at the first glance. He cites an explanation given in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "one can perform an act of speech, say by uttering words in order to test a microphone, without performing a speech act" (Jacob, 2011, p. 19). From the given example it is clear that the essential part of an act of speech is sound that one makes while speaking the language, whereas a speech act is mostly about communicating a meaning using specific linguistic tools to achieve a certain communicative goal. According to Austin (1962), "when we talk, we are not just saying things – making reference, conveying information – we are also, unavoidably, doing things" (Sidnell and Enfield, 2017, p.515). This insight summarizes the idea that boosted the research in pragmatics (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006) and talk in interaction (Levinson, 2013; Sacks, 1995; Schegloff, 1996, 1997, 2009), but more importantly, this vision of an interaction justifies the need for a methodology that focuses on the mechanisms of communication that help individuals to achieve their specific communicative goals.

Founded in the 1960s, Conversation Analysis reasserted itself as a method allowing a detail-focused analysis of interactions and encouraging scholars to notice patterns in the communicative process in order to solidify their understanding of ways in which different actions can be expressed during a conversation. CA's descriptive, detail-oriented nature stems from ethnomethodology, "a sociological approach that considers the nature and source of social order to be fundamentally empirical and locally accomplished" (Hall, 2019, p. 81). Eminent researchers in the field of sociological science such as Harold Garfinkel, Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson made a major contribution to the development of CA as a theoretical and methodological framework. H. Garfinkel (1964, 1967, 2002) saw the strength of CA in being "a radical alternative to sociological theories that posit the existence of an objective social order and draw on theoretical constructs to explain the lived experiences of members of society" (Hall, 2019, p. 81). The keystone of this methodology is its focus on analyzing social organization through the lens of communicative behavior of interlocutors in everyday interactions. Its narrow focus puts CA in an advantageous position when it comes to studying cross-cultural communication barriers as this methodology could potentially point out at the differences related to the generally accepted ways of establishing social organization through everyday communication in different cultures.

In Garfinkel's (1967, 2002) understanding, all communication-related theoretical findings in the field of sociology should be based on actual experiences that the individuals are having during the interaction. In other words, the data gathered in real communicative situations should guide researchers to notice, describe, document, and analyze patterns in communication instead of approaching the data while keeping a specific theory in mind. While analyzing the theoretical foundations of the aforementioned methodology, J. K. Hall

characterizes the object of CA very concisely by saying, “social facts are practical constructions, produced in and through mutually recognizable, publicly observable, common sense reasoning practices, that is, methods that members of society use to achieve social order in their local contexts” (Hall, 2019, p. 81). Sidnell and Enfield (2012) further develop this idea and state that “[a] CA account of intersubjectivity refers not to participants’ mutual representational understandings of the world but to their shared understandings of the work they are doing together as their interaction unfolds” (Hall, 2019, p. 82). This statement also explains how CA promotes an alternative approach to understanding a successful interaction. This theoretical framework does not imply that interlocutors should have the same mindset about the world around them in order to understand each other, but it entails that they should be aware of how their communicative behavior contributes to the interaction in order to come to mutual understanding of the results of their interactional exchange.

Based on the reasoning behind CA and social facts being its main object of study, we can conclude that this methodology is fully in line with the constructionists’ dynamic understanding of successful interaction, which means that this theoretical framework could be beneficial while approaching the concept of cross-cultural communication barriers. Studying the manifestations of cross-cultural communication barriers through the theoretical lens of conversation analysis can contribute to the field of intercultural communication by providing specific relevant examples of interpersonal interactions between native and non-native English speakers. Garfinkel’s argument can be applied to explain how the previously discussed negative connotation appeared around cross-cultural interaction. By letting the existing theories and ideas shape the angle from which they would look at intercultural conversation, researchers repeatedly found supporting evidence

in the data showing that intercultural communicative experience is full of factors impeding mutual understanding between the interlocutors. The aforementioned information transfer model of communication promotes one such problematic vision of intercultural communication by explaining the concept of noise preventing the two messages from being fully in line, meaning that an individual's way of thinking could be considered as a type of noise not allowing effective communication. Due to the fact that the social order of an interaction is a flexible and time-sensitive system, there is no doubt that that the findings of the research conducted from a static theoretical viewpoint could not necessarily guarantee an accurate representation of the existing social order or of communicative behaviors. A hypothetical example of an interaction utilizing time as the defining characteristic difference between interlocutors could serve as possible evidence for this argument. If we could have a person born in 2000 talk to a person born in 1800, it would be hard to approach that interaction from a purely theoretical standpoint as in that situation a researcher would have to pin down only certain parts of the interaction that would fall under the realm of a specific theory. In contrast, by approaching such an interaction by using the strength of CA as a qualitative research method, it is more probable that one would observe such details of the interaction that would lead to a more accurate representation of the conversation as it actually happened. Utilizing theories designed for specific characteristic differences to apply to others is simply ineffective and more an example of confirmation bias, as without more open methods for considering the multitude of factors causing potential breakdowns in communication the significance of some of those otherwise ignored factors is lost in any attempted study.

The aforementioned example of the interaction that cannot be naturally reconstructed (due to the impossibility of the parameters necessary to adhere to) also

demonstrates the complexity of the concept of communication barriers. One can hypothesize how communication barriers could potentially manifest themselves in the given circumstances but a multitude of factors would contribute to forming and directing the interaction, which means that without observing what actually happens in a certain communicative situation it would be almost impossible to predict how the conversation would go or what obstacles the interlocutors would encounter. Without observing closely how people interact in different communicative settings in modern society, researchers could possibly miss the development of new trends in communication. By gathering conversational data and documenting observations about it in the present day, scholars provide an opportunity for future researchers to conduct comparative analysis of trends regarding the interactional social order, which would allow them see the bigger picture and possibly observe some key fundamental principles of the evolution of communication technology.

The strength of conversation analysis is that it captures the uniqueness of the interaction itself. It allows researchers to add on to findings in a more active and open manner, rather than purely through confirmation of a theoretical basis by adhering to specific constraints. The CA's descriptive, inductive, and empirical use of detailed transcription and analysis of audiovisual recordings of interaction (Haddington, Mondada, & Nevile, 2013, p. 47) impose certain limitations on the process of inference-making while conducting research. For instance, CA encourages researchers to exclude the psychological analysis of ongoing conversation by limiting its focus to how the interaction is structured and ways in which it unfolds and by leaving assumptions about interactants' emotional state and intentions out of the framework's sight. It might seem that some findings gathered with the help of CA are too specific to lead researchers towards any bigger conclusions

about universal principles of communication; however, analyzed in retrospect such observations would be highly relevant for future research and could potentially lead to establishing deeper relationships between different variables that have influence on the process of communication.

After discussing the relevance and high potential of CA as a methodological approach in modern studies of communication, it is important to explain in more detail how this methodology can be particularly helpful for studying cross-cultural communication barriers. According to Albert & De Ruiter, CA's notion of understanding being "local to each moment in each specific situation" promotes a broader perspective on successful interaction (Albert & De Ruiter, 2018, p. 280). Particularly, within CA, understanding is seen as "a situation where people treat whatever they can observe as sufficient...to progress with whatever they are doing together" (Albert & De Ruiter, 2018, p. 281). This vision of understanding matches the constructionists' approach to identifying misunderstanding. It recognizes that as long as interactants keep taking turns and making joint efforts in coming to the communicative outcomes they would be satisfied with, one cannot witness "misunderstanding" in the interaction, but instead until the conversation progresses they will observe the process of conversation repair. By further developing this thought, Albert and De Ruiter (2018) point out that the way miscommunication is viewed from the CA perspective results in a peculiar paradox as it explains the concept as "the very methods people use to repair problems in interaction." Therefore, it implies that miscommunication has an important function in the interaction. By observing signs of miscommunication followed by examples of conversation repair, a researcher can conclude that communication can be considered successfully completed. Such a specific understanding of miscommunication allows us to approach analyzing cross-cultural interactions from the

same angle as any other social encounter instead of considering it undoubtedly a lost cause because of the “noise” that a difference in cultural backgrounds promotes.

Even though the cross-cultural interaction is inherently different from the interaction that does not involve different cultural backgrounds intersecting, it should not be approached as an interaction that is prone to communication breakdown purely because of its complicated nature. This is one of the advantages in CA’s arsenal when it comes to intercultural communication studies: it focuses on the objective observations in regards to how communicative mechanisms applied by native and non-native speakers affect the flow and direction that the interaction takes.

A. J. Liddicoat (2009), who specifically studied communication as culturally contexted practice stated:

Languages are, at least in part, culturally constructed artefacts which encode conceptual understandings of the world at various levels of embeddedness. The culturally contexted nature of communication therefore imposes a problem of inter-translatability for actual instances of communication across languages and cultures and necessitates a level of particularity for each actual instance of communication. (Liddicoat, 2009, p.115)

Liddicoat’s understanding of a deep connection between the language and culture necessitates the investigation in regards to where we can draw the line between these two complicated phenomena of sociological origin. Surprisingly, exploring the peculiarities of cross-cultural interactions and the communication barriers that appear during such interactions is what could bring researchers closer to forming a better understanding of a degree of convergence between the language and the culture.

A non-native speaker’s understanding of concepts in a foreign language (if a foreign language is learned in the non-native environment in early/late adulthood) is

formed purely on the non-native speaker's understanding of these concepts in their native language. This could be seen as a primary cause of cross-cultural barriers. It can be difficult to realize how much influence one's language has on the way they think, express their ideas, and put their thoughts into words. The interesting thing to notice about cross-cultural barriers is that in order to face them in the interaction, the non-native speaker has to have a level of linguistic competence that allows them at least to maintain the conversation in the foreign language. If the condition related to the language skills is not fulfilled, the non-native speaker would more likely encounter language barriers that occur due to a lack of the means to communicate their ideas, and not the cross-cultural communication barriers that are caused by filtering the concepts in a foreign language through their native cultural experience and bringing their "native way of thinking" into the conversation in the foreign language.

This research is aimed at pinning down some manifestations of cross-cultural communication barriers using CA as its primary methodology, which is why in the final part of this literature review it is important to go over the key terms and concepts that can potentially give us more insight into how the difference in the cultural backgrounds change the flow of the interaction. A thorough analysis of the concepts that could potentially be closely related to the manifestations of cross-cultural communication barriers has shown that such concepts as "irrelevant turn" in the context of "sequencing," "collaborative completion," and "recipient design" may have a direct bearing on the way an intercultural interaction unfolds. In support of this claim, we can cite Liddicoat (2009) who mentioned two of the aforementioned terms in regards to cultural differences influencing how the language can be potentially used: "aspects of communication such as sequencing, recipient

design and impact are read within a framework of cultural understandings about valued and appropriate language use” (Liddicoat, 2009, p.115).

In the methodological framework of CA the term “recipient design” is referred to as the way speakers intentionally design and adjust their talk depending on who their interlocutor is, which involves the speaker sharing their perception of what each specific person they talk to knows or understands (Bolden, 2014; Kitzinger & Mandelbaum, 2013; Sacks et al., 1974). Research in the field of CA has demonstrated that the principle of recipient design influences the interaction on several different levels, including its linguistic aspect and the word selection in particular (Sacks et al., 1974; Bolden, 2014). According to A. Deppermann, one of the defining features of recipient design is its temporal index, meaning that “it builds on partners’ prior turns and it involves anticipating recipients’ interpretations when formulating turns at talk” (Deppermann, 2014, p.16). Deppermann lists social status, group membership, personal and social relationship to speaker, knowledge, expectations, preferences, emotional state, and attentional state among the properties that characterize the recipient and can potentially become a reason for a certain adjustment in the talk made by the speaker under the governance of recipient design (Deppermann, 2014, p.16). As for the linguistic and communicative practices that are applied to create a recipient-oriented turn, choice of code, lexical choice, grammatical markers, innuendo, irony, sequential formats, and genre are recognized as important indicators of the recipient design being observed in the conversation (Deppermann, 2014, p.18).

Being closely related to one’s knowledge and perception of others, the examples of recipient design are particularly interesting to observe and analyze in the context of intercultural communication. This principle helps the speakers communicate their ideas in

the most effective way by using the common knowledge and understanding as a starting point for the dialogue. By designing their turn with respect to a specific recipient, the speaker also lays the foundation for their next turn (the speaker might have predictions and expectations for what the response could be). In the situation when a non-native speaker interacts with a native speaker, interlocutors do not share a common cultural background, which could potentially lead to the difficulties in implementing recipient design accurately and effectively. Looking at the recipient design as a potential source of cross-cultural communication barriers might lead to embracing a new vision of the cross-cultural interaction. Both native and non-native speakers would try to tailor their turns in the interaction; however, if the lack of relevant knowledge on either side causes a communication breakdown and the principle of recipient design fails to work, it would not be that easy to establish which speaker is responsible for the message not coming across. On the one hand, it could be mostly because of the speaker who initially did not manage to make their turn completely clear for their interlocutor, but on the other hand, it could be the other speaker, who was not able to get the message because of their specific expectations in regards to how things have to be worded. In this instance, the principle of recipient design can potentially serve as a driving force for the process of refocusing from making non-native speakers responsible for the success of intercultural interaction to moving towards a more objective understanding of factors causing misunderstanding in the intercultural interaction.

The principle of recipient design is directly related to “sequencing,” one of the fundamental concepts that researchers using CA operate with. The aforementioned idea of “talk-in-interaction” implies that the actions that speakers commit with words during the conversation are organized in a specific sequence that defines which direction the

interaction will take. Without turns being sequenced and built upon one another, it would be incredibly difficult to make sense of how the interaction unfolds. This is the reason why sequencing is important to take into consideration while analyzing the talk: the way each turn is designed depends not only on how speakers relate to each other but also on the turn preceding what is about to be said. T. Huth (2006) states that there is a direct correlation between the sequencing patterns that speakers choose to follow and the probability of communication breakdown in the context of cross-cultural communication. He writes, “One key locus for cross-cultural miscommunication in the flow of talk-in-interaction is thus the ‘relevant next turn’ provided within the sequential organization of verbal activities that differ across cultures” (p. 2026). To further elaborate on this idea, he specifically emphasizes that “if speakers provide ‘next turns’ (Sacks et al., 1974) that are not anticipated by their co-participant(s) in that particular sequential and situational environment due to sociopragmatic conventions, communication may become difficult or even break down” (Huth, 2006, p. 2026). Thus, unusual sequencing patterns, “irrelevant next turn” in particular, should be considered as possible indicators pointing at the presence of cross-cultural communication barriers in the interaction.

Another interesting connection between the idea of sequencing and the process of creating a shared understanding during the interaction was highlighted by E. Schegloff (1992), who drew researchers’ attention to how the general understanding is displayed simply by contributing to the interaction in a meaningful way, meaning that with each turn speakers demonstrate to each other how they understood what was said previously. In other words, sequencing has a vital function in the conversation: it helps interlocutors make sense of the interaction and implicitly demonstrate that speakers can reach understanding and bring their conversation to the outcome that both speakers will find sufficient. As G.

Bolden (2014) points out in her article about intercultural moments in immigrant family interactions, each turn should be viewed as “an opportunity to repair problems of understanding, speaking, and hearing,” because a turn-by-turn basis is the most effective way to develop mutual understanding (p. 211).

After having discussed how such communicative mechanisms as sequencing and recipient design allow researchers to detect possible miscommunication in an intercultural communication setting, it is important to gain insight on the role of “collaborative completion” in helping the interlocutors make sense of an interaction. Galina Bolden (2003) described “collaborative completion” as one of the “most sophisticated examples of coordinated behavior” (p. 188). Collaborative completion can be defined as “the phenomenon of two or more speakers working jointly to produce one single syntactic unit (King, 2018, p. 2). A number of researchers joined their efforts to shed more light on how this complex communicative mechanism works and were able to provide more insights about formal features inherent to collaborative completion and its structure.

In order to apply the concept of collaborative completion in practice to analyze the data, it is important to understand the established terminology developed to explain in detail how collaborative completion functions in the conversation. Being closely tied to the concept of sequencing and turn-taking, collaborative completion is implemented by the joint efforts of two or more speakers who produce turn-constructive units (TCUs) to complement each other’s turns. A turn-constructive unit is a basic unit of conversation that can be an utterance as short as a word or as long as a sentence. The main defining criterion for the TCU is its ability to state an accomplished communicative act (Wong & Waring, 2010; King, 2018).

The term compound turn-constructural unit is used to describe a bond of several conversational units (TCUs) that are closely tied to each other by the means of a grammatical relationship. An example that is often mentioned to specify the concept of CTCU is a conditional sentence where the main cause and the if-clause can be counted as two TCUs unified into one compound turn-conversational unit (Lerner, 1987, 1991, 1996). In order to describe a specific example of a collaborative completion in the real conversation, it is necessary to understand the concept of “transition relevance place” (TRP). It defines the point between the two turns that serves as a nexus between what the first speaker has said and what the second speaker projected as the best way to make that conversational unit complete. The term TRP is a specific kind of a possible completion point (PCP). The latter was introduced to indicate the spot at the end of the turn showing that the speaker completed their TCU and another speaker could potentially jump in. However, sometimes PCP can be observed working in the capacity of a transition relevance place (TRP) allowing the speakers produce the collaborative completion by taking turns to create a single meaningful TCU (Wong & Waring, 2010; King, 2018).

The two aspects that the research about collaborative completions is mainly focused on are syntactic ties forming a grammatical bond between the two units (Lerner, 1987, 1991; Lerner & Takagi, 1999; Local, 2005) and prosodic features (pitch, stress, volume, and sound length) used to invite the speaker to collaborate on completing the statement (Auer, 1996; Hayashi, 2003; Iwasaki, 2009; Lerner, 1996; Local, 2005; Szczepek, 2000). In this research, the collaborative completion is going to be explained mostly from the perspective of social actions that can be accomplished by speakers collaborating on completing each other’s turns. Social actions that collaborative completion tend to be associated with include: a word search, demonstrating teamwork, displaying attentiveness,

showing understanding, agreement or disagreement as well as doing humor (Kim, 2018). Indicating a presence of a social action that speakers accomplish as a part of talk-in-interaction, collaborative completion can be of high interest when it comes to studying cross-cultural communication barriers, which is why next it is important to explain why collaborative completion deserves special attention when it comes to analyzing an intercultural interaction.

Unsuccessful collaborative completion can be considered a significant indicator of cross-cultural communication barriers for two reasons. Firstly, there is extensive literature referring to collaborative completion as a feature used to display alignment (e.g. Schegloff, 1984; Bolden, 2003; Lindström & Sorjonen, 2013), meaning that by finishing an utterance that their interlocutor started, the speaker indicates that there is mutual understanding and that the interaction is going smoothly. When it comes to studying a cross-cultural interaction, it is especially important to pay attention to how successfully the speakers can finish the utterance for each other, as it correlates back to “shared understanding.” As was mentioned previously, failing to reach a shared understanding could be a sign of a communication barrier and analyzing such disalignment in the interaction could potentially bring more nuanced input on the nature of cross-cultural communication barriers. While analyzing examples of collaborative completion for the purpose of this research, it would be important to look at the sequence from a wider angle, because the turns before and after the sequenced pair of collaborative completion could show what exactly helped or prevented the speaker from successfully finishing the utterance that their interlocutor started. Thus, observing collaborative completion in each particular sequence would help us see the difference in the “work” that participants are doing in each interaction and how

skillful they are at initiating “collaborative completion” or demonstrating their understanding to their interlocutor.

Secondly, being directly related to the pragmatic competence of speakers, collaborative completion in cross-cultural interaction would help the researcher distinguish a manifestation of a cross-cultural communication barrier from a language barrier. In order to identify the invitation for the collaborative completion and finish the utterance in the foreign language, a speaker should have a well-established understanding of how the language functions at the grammatical, syntactic, and semantic level, which means that communication difficulty that occurs in the case of unsuccessful collaborative completion is rooted in the pragmatic aspect of talk rather than in purely linguistic incompetence.

To conclude, this literature review focuses on the problem of using loose definitions to describe different types of communication barriers and goes over the flaws of studying cross-cultural barriers using purely difference-based methodological approaches. Further, it goes into highlighting the benefits and strong potential of analyzing cross-cultural communication barriers using the theoretical paradigm of conversation analysis. The broad research in the realm of CA devoted to analyzing various fundamental communicative tools and mechanisms shows that proper sequence organization, accurate recipient design, and successful collaborative completions play a significant role in helping the speakers to reach shared understanding. Thus, the analysis part of this research aimed for shedding some light on the manifestations of cross-cultural communication barriers is going to be mainly focused around these concepts.

Significance of the Research

Studying the manifestations of cross-cultural communication barriers through the theoretical lens of conversation analysis can contribute to the field of intercultural

communication by providing specific relevant examples of interpersonal interactions between native and non-native English speakers. One of the goals of this research is to highlight the importance of intercultural interactions being approached from the interdisciplinary, practically oriented perspective. This study could potentially provide useful input not only for the field of communication theory, but also for such fields as sociolinguistics and foreign language education. It is important to understand that in the modern era of globalization foreign language acquisition is not only about learning syntactic structures and denotative meanings of words, but about developing the ability to interact socially with speakers of another language from a different social and cultural background. This study could also bring some valuable insight about communicative strategies used by non-native speakers to overcome communication barriers as well as give more details about Russian-English bilingualism.

Conversation Analysis is a great tool designed to help us better understand the communication process on the level not attached to a specific language or culture. It will be used in this study to document changes in speakers' language usage and communicative behavior in order to describe the communication barrier that appears between speakers who can speak the same language but do not share a common cultural background. Surprisingly, there is not much research done with an attempt to apply the concepts of the theoretical framework of conversation analysis to explaining the nature and structure of communication barriers that appear during the interaction in the cross-cultural communication setting. This research is designed to demonstrate a great potential of applying the ideas proposed by conversation analysts to the research conducted in the field of intercultural communication, second language acquisition, and foreign language education.

Research Design and Data Collection

This study focuses on the interaction between native English and native Russian speakers conversing with each other in English. In this research, the cultural background of participants serves as an independent variable, while their language usage and behavior are analyzed as a dependent variable. For this study, four participants were recruited:

- a native English speaker with no background in the Russian language and culture (ENGL1);
- a native English speaker with a significant background in the Russian language and culture (ENGL-RUS);
- a bilingual native Russian speaker with little to no experience of being immersed in the native English environment (RUS1);
- a bilingual native Russian speaker who spent a significant amount of time among native English speakers (RUS-ENGL).

Due to the specific requirements to the cultural background of the potential participants, there were four different channels by which participants were recruited:

- UWSP Campus (for native English-speaking participants with no background in Russian);
- UWSP Russian program (for native English-speaking participants with a background in Russian);
- Skyeng (online language school based in Moscow) (for native Russian-speaking participants with no experience in a native English-speaking environment);
- Fulbright (for native Russian-speaking participants with experience in a native English-speaking environment).

To be recruited to take part in this study, the individual must have complied with the following characteristics: male or female, age between 20 and 30 years old, native Russian speaker (born and raised in Russia, Belarus, or Ukraine) or native English speaker (born and raised in the USA). The aforementioned age range for the potential participants was chosen based on the classification of stages of development of psychology of people at different ages. The stage of early adulthood extends from 20 to 30 years old. Recruiting participants belonging to the same age group was important because it potentially could have helped the interaction go smoother. It would have been harder to recruit participants under 20 years old without going through additional procedures (e.g. getting parental consent) and this would have been difficult to do in an online-communication setting. Also, having a large age gap between the participants could have potentially influenced the structure of the interaction because taking initiative in the conversation or discussing certain topics could be completely different if there was no age gap. Therefore, in this study we intended to include people of 20-30 years old in order to exclude some additional factors that could have an effect on participants' communicative behavior.

Four participants were recruited to participate in the study. The descriptive nature of this research justifies the small number of participants and specific requirements regarding their cultural backgrounds. Having only four participants recruited in this study allowed us to collect six conversations to compare and analyze, which was sufficient for the initial goal of this study. If any participant had decided to withdraw from the participation in the research, we would have had to find a person to substitute them with in order to maintain the original design of the study.

Six interactions were arranged as follows:

1. ENGL1 with ENGL-RUS

2. ENGL1 with RUS1
3. ENGL1 with RUS-ENGL
4. ENGL-RUS with RUS1
5. ENGL-RUS with RUS-ENGL
6. RUS1 with RUS-ENGL

Table 1. Conversation Organization Reference Layout

	American Without Background in Russian Culture	American With Some Background in Russian Culture	Russian Without Background in American Culture	Russian With Some Background in American Culture
American Without Background in Russian Culture		Conversation 1		Conversation 6
American With Some Background in Russian Culture			Conversation 2	
Russian Without Background in American Culture	Conversation 4			Conversation 3
Russian With Some Background in American Culture		Conversation 5		

Each participant of this study had three separate one-on-one conversations with other participants. Their interactions that were organized via Skype will be monitored and observed closely. All the conversations were held in English and the participants were given a copy of written instructions beforehand. For each conversation at the agreed time, I invited the participants to join a Skype session, where I helped them start the conversation

and move on to the communicative tasks. Each conversation that participants were involved in took from 15 to 30 minutes depending on participants' responses to the prompts as well as their willingness and ability to articulate their thoughts in regards to the communicative tasks provided. All the conversations were recorded and analyzed by the means of linguistic and conversation analysis. I transcribed relevant parts of the conversations by manually typing up what is said and adding comments about participants' intonation or non-verbal behavior as it would pertain to the conversation being had and any further analysis to be made.

The participants were asked to complete a series of simple communicative tasks while having a conversation with each other. The communicative tasks include:

1. brief self-introduction;
2. word guessing game: each participant is given a list of five English words that they need to explain to their partner without naming the word itself; the partner needs to guess the word.
3. explaining cultural concept: participants are given two concepts from American and Russian culture and they will be asked to discuss the concepts and clarify them for each other if necessary.
4. storytelling: participants are asked to share a childhood memory or a story that comes to their mind when they think about funny/sad/significant event of their life.

Despite gathering data for all the aforementioned communicative tasks, in this particular paper only the second task, which was a word guessing game, is used for the analysis. All conversations gathered were compared to one another afterwards. Data analysis focused on the following aspects of interaction:

1. How do participants communicate their ideas using purely linguistic means of communication?
2. In what ways do intercultural communication barriers manifest themselves?
3. What kind of communicative strategies do participants use to overcome these barriers?
4. How much culturally charged language do the participants use interacting with each specific group?

Methods

Using linguistic and conversation analysis, this study looks at interactions between different groups of English speakers with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds and observes discrepancies in their methods of communication. To achieve the goal of this study, using the aforementioned combination of methods is advantageous as both of these methods focus on details of the conversation that are important and could potentially go unnoticed if less detail-centered methods are used. The linguistic analysis with the elements of conversation analysis as a research method provides a necessary premise for exploring the following communication problems:

1. negative image of non-native speakers lacking linguistic competence;
2. overgeneralized usage of the term “intercultural communication barriers”;
3. negative connotation around the phenomenon “intercultural communication barriers”.

Using the combination of conversation analysis and linguistic analysis makes it possible to focus not only on how participants communicate their ideas on the level of concepts but also on their emotional state and comfort level. For example, conversation analysis suggests that pauses or laughter particles in the conversation are very important

indicators of how a speaker is feeling about the interaction going in a certain direction. In this particular study, it is interesting to compare the way people act in the conversations with representatives of different groups participating in the study. While analyzing intercultural interactions with the help of conversation analysis to study cross-cultural communication barriers, it is important to pay close attention to the manifestation of categories that CA methodology operates with, including turn taking, sequencing, recipient design, conversation repair, epistemic stance, and collaborative completion. Finding examples capturing these important features in the recorded conversations allowed us to conduct a comparative analysis of all six interactions and describe how participants' cultural backgrounds affect the way the interaction unfolds.

Results

Built around the idea of comparing the way non-native speakers interact with each other versus how the interaction between two native speakers unfolds, this research is an attempt to look further into the affect that the speaker's cultural background has on the way they communicate with different people. The excerpts analyzed in this research belong to a set of data that was intentionally collected to be used for studying the manifestations of cross-cultural communication barriers. The word guessing game as a format for the communicative task used to collect data is highly advantageous when it comes to studying cross-cultural communication barriers. By giving participants a list of concepts they need to explain to their interlocutors, the researcher puts necessary constraints on how the interaction can possibly unfold, which in turn helps to keep participants focused on achieving their communicative goal of shared understanding. The format of the word-guessing game sets specific expectations in regards to when the interaction can be considered successfully completed, which forces participants to overcome communicative

difficulties that they encounter until the other person gives the right guess and the shared understanding is reached. Thus, the communicative task chosen as a primary instrument for collecting data in this research creates favorable conditions for studying cross-cultural communication barriers at the micro level.

In the natural process of communication that is not constrained by any artificially imposed boundaries, the outcome of the interaction cannot be traced precisely, as in a lot of situations individuals might think that they fully understood each other, even if in reality the shared understanding has not been reached. In addition, they might be too polite to mention that they are not sure if they understood their interlocutor right. This is the problem that the word-guessing game helps the researcher solve: instead of letting participants decide what outcome of the interaction would be sufficient for them, the word-guessing game sets clear criteria for a successful outcome. As a result, the researcher is able to pay close attention to the difficulties that appear on the participants' way to shared understanding. The communicative mechanisms that the participants utilize to reach shared understanding in this case are the same as in any other communicative setting; however, failing to get these mechanisms to work effectively in an intercultural interaction would indicate the presence of cross-cultural communicative barriers, the manifestations of which are the focus of this study.

In the previous section of this thesis, it was explained why recipient design, relevant next turn, and collaborative completion can be considered as indicators of shared understanding reached by the speakers during their interaction, whereas failing to successfully use these communicative mechanisms points at communication breakdowns that could be potentially caused by cross-cultural communication barriers. In the analysis section, we are going to have a more detailed look at how the aforementioned

communicative devices are used by native and non-native English speakers in the context of intercultural interaction.

To start with, it is important to look at some transcripts of the interaction with no signs of communication breakdown present. The main criterion that characterizes such conversation is a well-organized sequence that follows a specific pattern purposefully leading the interlocutors to reaching their communicative goal. A good steady flow of the interaction when speakers are able to build the talk together based off each other's turns indicate that speakers are more likely to achieve a shared understanding during their conversation. In this study, conversations between the interactants with different cultural backgrounds generally witnessed more disruptions in terms of sequence organization. However, not every interaction based around explaining the concept led to some kind of misunderstanding, which highlights the importance of studying cross-cultural communication barriers on a case-by-case basis instead of assuming that they would appear under the governance of a certain principle or rule. Excerpt A from Conversation 1 demonstrates a clearly observable sequence, which helps the speakers come to a shared understanding.

Excerpt A. Conversation 1 (EngRus – Eng1)

- 1 **S1:** Umm.. This is something you do when you like go on vacation, when
- 2 you travel abroad
- 3 **S2:** Relax?
- 4 **S1:** No, um think more touristy
- 5 **S2:** Explore
- 6 **S1:** You're pretty close with that one. Umm.. It's like... ohh
- 7 **S2:** Adventure?
- 8 **S1:** No-no.. It's um when there's ohh I can't.. I can't think of a word that

9 doesn't use the part of the word. Umm.. that's an activity that you do
10 like if you are in say New York City or something and there's a bunch
11 of different places that you, you know, mmm
12 **S2:** Traveling, umm advent.. exploring, discovering? Discover?
13 **S1:** Noo, you're not like finding
14 **S2:** Visit?
15 **S1:** That's close that's close umm but specifically for like .. tourist attractions
16 and things like that. Or you could like if you are traveling around the
17 countryside what are you doing? You are..
18 **S2:** This is hard! Umm
19 **S1:** This is a tough one!
20 **S2:** Sightseeing!
21 **S1:** There you go!
22 **S2:** Sightseeing?
23 **S1:** Yeah
24 **S2:** Okay! Cool!

This conversation between two native speakers shows how the interaction gradually unfolds from a general explanation of the concept proposed by Speaker 1 (S1) to the accurate guess suggested by Speaker 2 (S2). It is important to note that the interaction does not change its general direction staying within the context created by the first turn “something you do when you like go on vacation, when you travel abroad.” All the guesses that S2 makes fit under the description of a vacation activity and each such turn by S2 helps S1 understand what details they need to add in their response in order to help S2 move towards the concept they need to guess. In other words, this conversation is a perfect example of talk-in-interaction, when speakers work together on developing the meaning in joint efforts until they get to the point which both of them find as a sufficient successful result for the conversation. As we can see, the conversation does not have to be a perfect sequence following the pattern “explanation – right guess – approval” in

order to qualify as an interaction without visible signs of communication breakdown. The main criteria that need to be taken into account while analyzing the intercultural interaction in terms of cross-cultural communication barriers are the absence of irrelevant turns and visible progress of talk-in-interaction, when the researcher can witness the equal contribution to the meaning co-construction made by both speakers.

Next, in order to understand further how the communication breakdown can be spotted in the intercultural interaction, it is important to look at the excerpts of data demonstrating a sequence that does not progress as smoothly and analyze the factors that prevent speakers from building the meaning based off each other's turns. Excerpt B from Conversation 2 demonstrates how the interaction built around explaining and guessing the concept can be focused on looking for the description that will be clear instead of contributing to the sequence in a way that would allow the speakers to collaborate on tailoring the wrong guesses and moving towards the right concept. One striking difference that can be observed between Excerpt A and Excerpt B is that in the former example each wrong guess is evaluated by S1 and in their turn they add the information that will narrow down the circle of words that S2 can potentially consider, whereas in the latter example S1 lets S2 know that their guess is wrong, but in their turn instead of adding on to the previous guess, they try to start the conversation over by taking a different route with how they are going to explain the concept.

Excerpt B. Conversation 2 (Rus1 – EngRus)

- 1 **S1:** Alright ummm for example this word ah it's an adjective and if you
- 2 do not like to do something and maybe um you are very if your
- 3 parents for example try to make you do something you don't want to
- 4 do this and you are very..? ermm (hhhh)
- 5 **S2:** Reluctant? Umm

6 **S1:** No-no-no
7 **S2:** Uneasy?
8 **S1:** No-no-no. Maybe another way for do this.. if you if you very like
9 something you just try to like do everything and you do not do not
10 distract by something and you do everything for this and you very
11 very pay a lot of attention for this and and you're .. it's an adjective
12 for you it should describe you as a person
13 **S2:** Devoted?
14 **S1:** Maybe something no. Umm.. You are very like like a got right? Ahh
15 You can ahh got (ehhh hhhh) can you? can you guess what can be?
16 Got.. maybe not a got maybe donkey.. donkey.. will be suitable for
17 this. They are very.. they don't want to go with you and they just try
18 to stay in one place and they do not want to go
19 **S2:** Stubborn
20 **S1:** Yeah! Right!
21 **S2:** Okay (hhh)

If we try to demonstrate the aforementioned difference graphically, we could potentially use a set of overlapping circles to represent the way the interaction between the native speakers unfolds, focusing more and more within the set and unchanging context. The interaction between a native speaker and a non-native speaker could be drawn as a set of circles barely intersecting with each other, which would symbolize the tendency of S1 to start explaining from the beginning instead of trying to adjust the explanation based off the previous guesses, while still maintaining a single conversation.

As it can be seen from Figure 2, the first interaction is shaped as a group of interconnected meaningful layers created in the process of turn-taking and leading to the right guess. On the contrary, the second interaction is not structured around the single starting point, but several tangentially related started points working off the pretense that the previous guess was completely incorrect, so new guesses are working towards

establishing successful completion of the conversation. The circles in the second graph are the same size to show that the conversation was not becoming more and more focused as with the first example, but rather moving between entirely different approaches to test the waters and try to figure out what the interlocutor would understand.

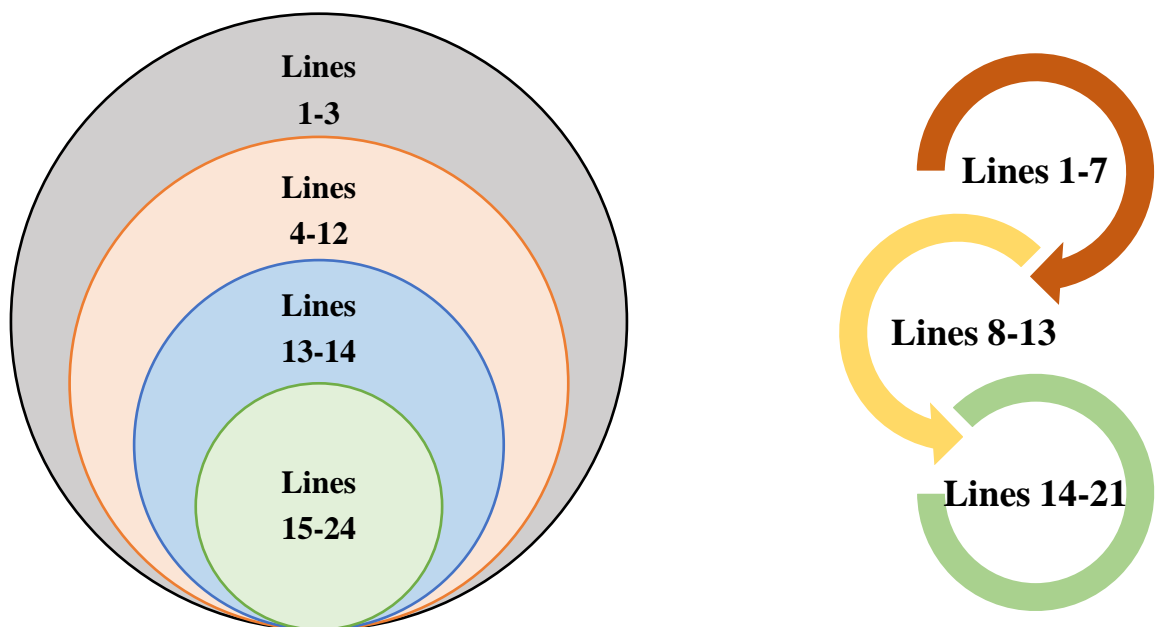


Figure 2. Graphic representation of the sequence flow: 1 - Excerpt A. 2 - Excerpt B.

In Excerpt B a non-native speaker has the leading role in the interaction as they need to explain the concept. Looking at Excerpt C will give us insight into how the sequence pattern changes when a native speaker takes up the leading role and a non-native speaker needs to guess the concept. It is important to look at the interactions between native and non-native speakers from different angles because there are many factors that could potentially affect the result of the conversation.

Excerpt C. Conversation 4 (Eng1 – Rus1)

- 1 **S1:** Okay so the next word is um this is a word that you would use to
- 2 describe someone that only cares about themselves, doesn't care
- 3 about other people..

4 **S2:** Mhm.. It's a bird?
5 **S1:** Ahhh
6 **S2:** It's a bird? Err or? Word, word. I heard bird. Okay
7 **S1:** Oh no. I think it would be counted as an adjective, a way to describe
8 someone
9 **S2:** Mmm someone that.. he is arrogant maybe? Orrr
10 **S1:** That's close. Ermm it's really like to think about yourself more than
11 anybody else
12 **S2:** Yeah.. just *egoist*? I don't know..
13 **S1:** Umm you would say.. Sometimes you can say. Umm hmmm I am
14 trying to come up with a good way to describe it.
15 **S2:** Okay.
16 **S1:** So someone who puts their wants and needs ahead of someone
17 else's..
18 **S2:** Yeah.. I understand. I understand. Umm.. Maybe self-orientated
19 **S1:** Ohhh that was really close. The first part of that word was right in
20 there.
21 **S2:** Um ohh sooo selfish?
22 **S1:** Yes, that's right!

A couple of interesting aspects that this interaction puts forward for further analysis include:

1. An irrelevant turn caused by mishearing and indicating the basic level of communication breakdown (lines 1-6);
2. Recipient design by S1 to repair the sequence (line 7-8);
3. An example of the manifestation of language barrier caused by bringing up a word that is not commonly used in the English language (line 12).

If we focus on the sequence pattern in this example, we can notice that the native speaker (S1) puts the effort into keeping this conversation following the direction that they set in the beginning by including fair evaluations for the guesses suggested by the non-native

speaker to help them move towards the right guess. The first communication breakdown appears after the first turn by S1 when S2 mishears the word, which makes them question the meaning of what was just said. It is interesting that S2 catches their mistake after seeing that S1 is confused by the response that was given after their turn. Lines 1-6 of Excerpt C include the example of the irrelevant turn that indicates the communication breakdown that could be placed on the intersection of general and linguistic communication barriers. It is important to note that the sequence is repaired by the joint efforts of two speakers: S2 analyzes the context and realizes their mistake while S1 adjusts their initial explanation by including the information regarding the part of speech. An interesting observation that can be made after looking at different examples of interactions based around a word-guessing game is that the only participants that bring up sentence structure-related terms (namely, parts of speech) are non-native speakers that seem to perceive the language largely through the prism of its linguistic components and rules; rules by which the language should be organized in order to make sense. While talking to each other, the native English speaking participants did not feel the necessity of bringing up parts of speech to specify the concept, while the non-native speakers often included a part of speech in the beginning of their explanation as a primary hint pointing at what exactly the word they are explaining actually means. This is why it is incredibly interesting that in this instance when the sequence broke down and the irrelevant turn appeared, the native speaker resorts to defining the part of speech for the non-native speaker knowing that this information could help them get back on track and re-establish the sequence for the whole conversation. This is a good example of why recipient design is considered one of the most important factors helping speakers reach a shared understanding. By tailoring the turn to what the interlocutor is familiar with, the speaker

shows that they are willing to work further on reaching the desired point in the conversation.

The next point in this interaction when the breakdown in the sequence is observed can be found in the transcript of Excerpt C line 12. By bringing up the word “*egoist*,” the native Russian speaker shows that they understand the concept, because “*egoist*” (эгоист) in Russian is a common word used to describe a selfish person. If the difference in the linguistic and cultural background was not the defining criterion of the intercultural interaction, the conversation could be counted as successfully resolved, however it is not what we see in this interaction. S1 does not recognize the guess “*egoist*” as successful or even close to being right and continues to try to come up with an explanation that would be clear for the interlocutor. Based on the aforementioned explanations for how the language and cross-cultural barriers can be distinguished, this example should be placed in the category of language barriers because in this case it is not that S2 failed to switch from their native mindset to adjust their understanding of the concept but rather failed to bring up the specific word that is commonly used to address the concept. As we can see, the speakers were able to reach the common understanding in the end by repairing the sequence in order to understand what their personal contribution should be so that they narrow the circle of possible guesses down to the right one.

A very interesting parallel can be drawn between Excerpt C and Excerpt D from Conversation 3 in regards to the word “*egoist*,” causing the disruption in the sequence in the conversation between a native English and native Russian speaker.

Excerpt D. Conversation 3 (Rus1 – RusEng)

1 **S1:** Let’s try.. I will try to explain next one. Alright. Ehh when you just

- 2 care only about yourself and do not pay attention for a lot of
3 different people around you, you're and you just I don't know just
4 concentrate on you only on you
- 5 **S2:** Selfish
- 6 **S1:** Yeah, yeah. You got it.
- 7 **S2:** Easy! Alright. I forget the word at first and I was like "*egoist*".. does
8 this word exist in English? "*Egoist*?" I don't know..
- 9 **S1:** I think it exists..

Excerpt D documents the interaction between two native Russian speakers conversing in English. The sequence of their interaction in this case does not demonstrate any sign of visible communication breakdown and S2 easily guesses the word. The curious part of this conversation actually starts after S2 gives the correct guess that is approved by S1. The comment in line 6 reflects back to the aforementioned peculiarities related to how native Russian speakers perceive the word "selfish." The difference between the two native Russian speakers participating in this conversation is that S1 was not introduced to English in the native English environment, while S2 has some experience of living in an English-speaking country. The first guess that came to the mind of the participant without any experience among native speakers in Excerpt C was the word that exists in the English language but is not commonly used to describe a selfish person. This participant knew the word "selfish," but being heavily influenced by how they perceive this concept in their native language, they guessed "*egoist*" first. An interesting question that the examples from Excerpt C and D highlight is, "Where do we draw the line between insufficient linguistic competence causing language barriers and the way of thinking developed around one's native language creating cross-cultural barriers in communication?" Speaker 2 in Excerpt C was certainly familiar with the word as they eventually guessed it, but the way their system of linguistic associations is built in English

diverges from the one most native speakers have, which more likely to cause the communication barriers of cross-cultural nature. The fact that speaker 2 (who has some experience of communicating in a native English-speaking environment) in Excerpt D guessed “selfish” first and then commented on how “*egoist*” came to their mind can point us in the direction of believing that the system of associations that non-native speakers develop in the process of learning a foreign language gradually evolves if the language learner spends a good amount of time in the environment that introduces them to how the language is used by native speakers. This point emphasizes the importance of re-focusing from viewing the language purely as a structured system built by the means of words, syntactic norms, and grammatical rules, as the way this system is used heavily depends on social, geographical, historical, and cultural factors. Thus, Excerpts C and D help us understand that the roots of cross-cultural communication barriers lay in our personal system of associations which is mainly formed around our linguistic experiences, whereas language barriers can be tied to one’s lack of linguistic means to express their ideas.

After exploring the role of proper sequencing in the process of meaning co-construction, next we can move on to looking at and analyzing the phenomenon of collaborative completion, which this paper claims as another bright indicator of reaching a shared understanding. Excerpt E presents an example of successful collaborative completion implemented by the participants who speak English natively. The main factors that need to be taken into account while analyzing the implementation of collaborative completion in the context of a word-guessing game are: the appropriateness of the proposed explanation and the accuracy of the guess suggested in terms of its syntactic role and semantic meaning. The fundamental requirement that defines collaborative completion is the high level of cooperation between the speakers, meaning

that one speaker should insert the invitation for the interlocutor to finish their idea at the right point in the conversation. This implies that before the invitation, the turn should be built in a way that could allow the second speaker to narrow down the list of possible options to one word that would mark successful collaborative completion. The delicate work that the person initiating collaborative completion is doing can lead to success only if the two speakers find themselves living in a common mindset, as the information that the initiator finds sufficient to guess the word should align with how much information their interlocutor needs in order to insert the proper ending to the conversation unit created by the first speaker.

Excerpt E. Conversation 1 (EngRus – Eng1)

- 1 **S1:** Umm this is.. there're a couple different variations of this word if you
- 2 ahh if you do something that makes you look really ahh dumb or
- 3 unfavorable around other people you can say that is...?
- 4 **S2:** Embarrassing?
- 5 **S1:** There you go!
- 6 **S2:** Nice

Excerpt E demonstrates that the speakers have the same understanding of the nuances of the word “embarrassing.” S1 clearly indicated the invitation for S2 to suggest their guess by switching to a rising intonation and making a pause. This example follows a very clear sequence pattern, where the speakers quickly achieve their communicative goal. Next, we are going to look at Excerpt F introducing an analogous conversation built around guessing the word “embarrassed” with the main difference of it taking place between the participants for whom English is not a native language. The first detail that is important to observe is the length of the first turn (lines 1-8) and the presence of the comments that are not directly related to the semantic meaning of the concept that needs

to be explained (“Erm I. I am not sure if I know like the connotation and the context of this word but I’ll try to explain”). If analyzed in comparison, first turns from Excerpt E and F show that non-native speakers seem to find it more difficult to be concise and accurate when it comes to the nuances of meaning. Moreover, the aforementioned comment from lines 2 and 3 (Excerpt F) shows that S1 finds it necessary to admit that they are not sure about the nuances of how this word should be used. Following how the sequence unfolds allows us to see that this is one of the reasons why multiple attempts for collaborative completion that S1 initiates do not lead to S2 completing them successfully.

Excerpt F. Conversation 1 (RusEng – Rus1)

- 1 **S1:** Ahhh okay. It’s ah similar word to a word disappointed to be
2 disappointed. Erm I I am not sure if I know like the connotation and
3 the context of this word but I’ll try to explain. So you are not
4 disappointed but this word when people for example make rude
5 comments but you didn’t expect. For example, your colleague that
6 was very nice to you and then this colleague makes like I don’t know
7 rude comment and you’re “okay, I am very ..?” but not disappointed,
8 another word
9 **S2:** I am very hmhmhm I am very stressful I am very ehh
10 **S1:** A little bit offended I’m like offended so I’m not disappointed, I am..
11 **S2:** Ahh I’m stressful.. I’m urm scared. Ehh no-no-no, not scared. I am
12 mmm.. Yeah, I understand the I understand the direction, but ahh
13 hmhmhmhmh
14 **S1:** A lot like actress at the movies like on Netflix they always like “I am
15 so mhm..” or there’s a lot of videos on Youtube with a title “my
16 mhmhmh stories” when people tell the stories at work
17 **S2:** Sa-sad? Sadness? Sad?
18 **S1:** No.. For example, you [expletive] your pants or something in public
19 and they’re like “ohhh that’s so..”
20 **S2:** Ah. Ah. Ah. It’s so embarrassing, embarrassed?

21 **S1:** Exactly!

22 **S2:** Yeeah!

The most interesting part about analyzing Excerpt F is that the sequence built by S1 and S2 technically does not show major signs of communication breakdown marked by an irrelevant turn. Failing to reach successful collaborative completion does not necessarily cause problems with sequencing, but clearly indicates that a shared understanding has not been achieved at that particular point in the conversation. Four invitations for collaborative completion can be observed in this conversation (lines 7, 10, 15, and 19), while only the last one can be considered successful, which means that the interlocutors achieved their communicative goal eventually, despite it taking them more turns and time to narrow down the list of options to the right word. In this case, multiple unsuccessful attempts to implement collaborative completion shows that not having a clear understanding of nuances of meaning lowers the chance of reaching a shared understanding without skillfully using an appropriate recipient design. Excerpt G, on the contrary, introduces an example of successful collaborative completion between the same participants who do not speak English natively. The key difference between Excerpt F and G is that S1 makes sure to introduce more than enough details about the concept before initiating the collaborative completion, which helps S2 picture the described activity clearly and come up with the word for it in English.

Excerpt G. Conversation 3 (RusEng – Rus1)

1 **S1:** Umm so the third word is. I live in Wisconsin and people like to do it
2 a lot here because there is beautiful nature around: forests, lakes
3 and stuff like that. Ahh in Russia for example we do we like to do it
4 too, but me personally I did it like once in my life I guess. So you
5 usually have a great company ahh you take everything you take a

6 tent, you take a I don't know how to call this thing that you can grill
7 you can do barbecue ah and you go to the forest or to the lake or to
8 the seashore seashore yeah to the lakeshore ahh or you can go
9 deep to the forest and you usually do this. You usually stay overnight
10 and this is called..
11 **S2:** Like camping? Ehh. Yeah, fine! Cool.

It is also important to note that the explanation for the concept of “camping” (lines 1-10) in Excerpt G is tailored well for the interlocutor as the description is mainly based on S2’s cultural background. The analogous conversation built around the concept of “camping” took place between the native English-speaking participants and is introduced in the Excerpt H.

Excerpt H. Conversation 1 (EngRus – Eng1)

1 **S1:** Ahh okay.. so this is an activity that some families doing um you are
2 outdoors
3 **S2:** Arguing about politics
4 **S1:** Ahmm (hhh) it doesn't have to be families friends can do this. It's an
5 outdoor activity when you spend a night
6 **S2:** Camping?
7 **S1:** Yep!
8 **S2:** Alright!

One glance at the sequence reinforces the point that was put forward earlier: while native speakers can easily and concisely create explanations for concepts, non-native speakers often need to take an additional step of filtering out their native understanding of the concept in order to bring up only the relevant details. Having to focus only on the nuances of meaning that usually manifest themselves in a foreign language, non-native speakers need to master their communicative sub-skills associated with recipient design in order to avoid facing cross-cultural communication barriers. On the other hand, talking

to a person that they share a cultural background with can make the recipient design easier by letting the speaker focus on the familiar nuances of meaning with which they are the most comfortable.

Excerpt I demonstrates a curious aspect of the understanding that appears between non-native speakers who share the same cultural background. In certain contexts it might seem that the sequence is built around the ideas and context rather than accurate language usage or specific vocabulary. In Excerpt I, S1 explains the concept of “sightseeing” to S2 and initiates a collaborative completion (line 8) that encourages S2 to suggest the guess that turns out to be right.

Excerpt I. Conversation 3 (Rus1 - RusEng)

- 1 **S1:** The next word will be a noun also and you know if a foreigner arrives
- 2 to your country you should show them this in your
- 3 **S2:** (Hospitality?)
- 4 **S1:** What?
- 5 **S2:** Hospitality?
- 6 **S1:** No-no-no. No-no. It's a noun and ehh you show this around your
- 7 town or around the city, ahh the famous places and exactly famous
- 8 places for example monuments ehh it will be like a ..?
- 9 **S2:** Mhm, sightseeing
- 10 **S1:** Yeah-yeah. You got it!
- 11 **S2:** I was thinking like maybe you should show your hospitality
- 12 **S1:** Yeah, it can be also.. Yeah

An interesting observation that needs to be made about the second part of this collaborative completion is that instead of proposing a guess with a rising intonation to check their guess (line 9), S2 puts this guess forward as the response that is 100% right with no doubt. From all the examples of collaborative completions analyzed in this study, this example stands out because this particular invitation for the collaborative completion

(“it will be like a..?”) does not project certainty in relation to what the concept is, however S2 guesses it as though there are no other options in regards to what it could be. This example can be put in the category of sequences characterized by a well-tailored explanation for the concept, which allows S2 to end the conversation unit successfully. The example given in Excerpt J can be considered a successful sequence overall as S2 was able to guess the word, however several unsuccessful attempts of collaborative completions indicates the presence of communication barrier preventing speakers from reaching a shared understanding more effectively.

Excerpt J. Conversation 5 (EngRus – RusEng)

- 1 **S1:** Ahh this word describe when you are waiting for something for
- 2 example it's like a holiday or the best day in your life and your for
- 3 example girlfriend just prepared for you something and you are..?
- 4 **S2:** Excited?
- 5 **S1:** Something like this buuut you are very..
- 6 **S2:** Anxious? Anticipating?
- 7 **S1:** You didn't expect that
- 8 **S2:** Ohh surprised
- 9 **S1:** Yeah, but but it is a noun
- 10 **S2:** Surprise?
- 11 **S1:** Yeah, yeah, yeah
- 12 **S2:** Okay

The way in which the invitations for collaborative completions were put forward by a non-native speaker outlines the main reason why they did not lead to a right guess. The situation that a non-native speaker described to introduce the concept of “surprise” was only partially suitable as an accurate explanation. It appears that in a lot of cases analyzed within this study the common issue causing disparity in understanding between native English speakers and non-natively speaking participants lies in a different

understanding of what information would be sufficient to fully capture the idea or what details would make the explanation specific enough to suggest the correct word. By ending the first turn with an invitation for a collaborative completion, S1 is showing that for them that explanation would be sufficient to guess the word “surprise,” however the following turn by S2 shows that for S2 this explanation is not specific enough as it can be applied to a range of various ideas. After a couple of inaccurate guesses followed by the lack of guidance from S1, the defining feature for the concept of “surprise” was brought up in line 7, which helped S2 narrow down their understanding to the right word. This is just one of the examples demonstrating that the way we think and express our ideas greatly influences our potential for reaching a shared understanding while communicating with others. It is not enough to put the explanation together based on what one’s associations with the concept are, it is necessary to tailor it depending on the interlocutor’s knowledge and associations. Cultural background is undoubtedly a factor directing the process of thinking forcing people to pay attention to more familiar things and ignore things with which they have little experience. This is why carefully considered recipient design is particularly important for maintaining a smooth sequence and accomplishing successful collaborative completions whereas the lack of a common cultural background could make it more difficult to tailor the turn appropriately.

Excerpt K is included in the analysis to demonstrate how inaccurate recipient design can cause the communication breakdown that requires repairing. The first detail that is easy to notice is the length of the first turn by S1 (line 1-11).

Excerpt K. Conversation 4 (Rus1 – Eng1)

1 **S1:** And ermm alright, next one is the hardest one I think. Alright, ahh I

2 know the umm this name it should exist ahh the cartoon maybe it
3 calls like this. It.. the first one will be this word but the next word will
4 be time. And it's cartoon. It's it's it was really popular I think.
5 Something time. And there is a lot of umm characters. I don't know
6 how to describe. And of alright and the other way to describe it
7 maybe if you like to travel, yeah? And if you if you want to go to
8 somewhere and you shou.. you sh.. you will ahh you will chose to
9 ahh to travel by hitchhiking, it's you know.. it's really errr a big.. ahh
10 not travel but very crazy way to travel but it will be call called like
11 ermm

12 **S2:** Scary? Umm

13 **S1:** Very.. Mmm I don't know

14 **S2:** Adventurous?

15 **S1:** Yes. Yes, but the noun is

16 **S2:** Adventure.

17 **S1:** Yes, you are right.

18 **S2:** Ahhh, okay. Cool!

19 **S1:** An Adventure Time. Do you know this cartoon?

20 **S2:** Noo, no, I don't know that one.

21 **S1:** That's why you didn't understand me. Alright.

22 **S2:** Yeah, that's okay. We got it eventually.

23 **S1:** Alright!

After further looking into the structure of this turn, it becomes clear that it can be divided into two parts: the first one includes the explanation with the recipient design that does not seem to correspond with S2's understanding of the concept. After not getting the expected reaction or any answer from S2, S1 decides to switch to another explanation hoping that it would possibly communicate their idea better. Thus, sometimes the length of the turn can also indicate the presence of cross-cultural communication barriers, especially when the turn appears to unite two separate conversation units in one. The problem with the

explanation that was suggested first is that it was built around the idea that S1 assumed S2 would be familiar with, however it did not lead to success as their assumption was wrong. It is also interesting to look at the short sequence which takes place after the correct guess was put forward (lines 19-23). S1 directly asks S2 if they know the cartoon that was initially used as a basis for the explanation and reflects back to why their first turn did not go as they expected. Cultural references as well as elements of culture ingrained in the language can be the biggest challenge for non-native speakers when it comes to implementing recipient design effectively.

In regards to this last point, it would be especially interesting to look at the next two examples introduced in Excerpts L and M. The concept that these conversations are built around is “village.” Having a very specific cultural meaning in the Russian language, the word village turned out to be hard for the native English speaker to guess when it was explained by a native Russian speaker, whereas the exact same explanation worked for another participant for whom Russian is their native language. Therefore, the examples presented in Excerpts L and M show that the concepts with rich cultural sub-context can be more difficult to reach shared understanding on, especially in the case when the speakers do not have any point of reference in regards to how the concept is seen in a different culture.

Excerpt L. Conversation (Rus 1 – Eng1)

- 1 **S1:** The next word is the noun and mmm it's the little place where people
- 2 live
- 3 **S2:** A house?
- 4 **S1:** Ehh no bigger it's the .. it includes a lot of.. um not a lot but several
- 5 houses you know ehh with
- 6 **S2:** Apartments?

7 **S1:** No-no-no. Umm several houses I mean not in apartments. It's
8 nearby houses you know and umm they're farmers and umm
9 **S2:** A community?
10 **S1:** No.. Um they live um
11 **S2:** A neighborhood?
12 **S1:** No-no-no.. You know we have city, town but little one is.. littler than
13 the town you know
14 **S2:** Umm a neighborhood, community.. ermm
15 **S1:** It's the you know oh eh sometimes eh the community here have
16 cows, eh goats and something like this.. and
17 **S2:** A farm?
18 **S1:** It it it's close, buut.. farm but not farm.. it's bigger
19 **S2:** Park?
20 **S1:** No-no-no-no-no.. How I should um describe it um in another case..
21 umm I don't know
22 **S2:** Field?
23 **S1:** No-no-no-no-no. Ehh this place it's little than town right? And there
24 are umm the several houses and people there almost all the time just
25 ahh I don't know try to ahh try to grow the crop and just erm and just
26 they all of them have animals nearby and just try to take from the cow
27 for example milk
28 **S2:** Farmers? Farming?
29 **S1:** Yes.. Maybe. It's close, it's close but
30 **S2:** Zoo?
31 **S1:** I don't know but you know in Russia they have a lot of this kinda
32 places like little places with community, with crop, and you don't
33 know?
34 **S2:** I don't know.. I don't know if I am able to guess this one..
35 **S1:** It's.. it's a village.
36 **S2:** Ohh village! Okay! I am sorry I didn't get that. You did a good job
37 explaining that. You did. That was a good explanation.

- 38 **S1:** Maybe farm will be suitable for this explanation.. I don't know if in
39 America villages are similar with our villages. I don't know.
40 **S2:** We don't really have villages. Like yeah, I wouldn't.. I couldn't think
41 of.. yeah, I don't know. That's a good.. that's a good explanation of it
42 but yeah I am not sure if I would be able to guess it.

Excerpt M. Conversation (Rus1 - RusEng)

- 1 **S1:** You know in Russia you have a lot of these. It's not a city, it's not a
2 town, it's a little one, so it's ehh where people organize their life
3 with cows and crops..
4 **S2:** Village? Villages?
5 **S1:** Yep. Yes, of course.

It is amazing how much shorter the sequence between the two native Russian speakers presented in Excerpt M is in comparison with the previous conversation. It appears that S1 did not feel that the long detailed explanation is necessary to reach a shared understanding on this concept while talking to someone with whom they share a cultural background. The sequence is smooth and does not show any signs of communication breakdowns present.

Conclusion

Overall, this study suggests looking at cross-cultural communication barriers from a different perspective; namely, paying attention not only to the obvious features that the representatives of different cultures are influenced by, but also considering the possibility of a deeper layer of culture defining the ways in which people communicate with each other. The tight interlinkage between language and culture is directly related to the aforementioned deeper level of culture, as the way we think and express our thoughts is defined by the knowledge gained in a certain cultural environment and by the set of

associations that we develop while experiencing life through the prism of the culture that we are exposed to. One of the key questions that this study was initially aimed at exploring further is what features of the interaction can signal the deeper influence of one's cultural background on their communicative behavior. The Results section of this study includes multiple examples demonstrating that cross-cultural communication barriers can primarily be traced in the interaction by paying attention to three main conversational features: flow of the sequence, recipient design, and collaborative completions. There is no doubt that the cultural background and the native language of a speaker heavily influence the way they express their ideas and design their turn using the linguistic means available in the foreign language. In this study, we analyzed both interactions that do not show any signs of communication obstacles faced with participants effectively achieving their communicative goals and the examples of communication difficulties that mainly appeared in cases of intercultural interaction. The manifestations of cross-cultural communication barriers that can be observed on the micro-level of the interaction stay consistent throughout the analysis. The main point that can be drawn from all of these examples is that the responsibility of the successful outcome of the conversation cannot be placed on one particular side of the intercultural interaction. While a non-native speaker is expected to word ideas in a way that a native speaker can easily understand, on their turn a native speaker could approach a talk in the intercultural setting with a more open mind in order to help the interlocutor maintain their common talk-in-interaction more effectively.

Even though this study proves the benefits of the chosen research design for the purpose of studying cross-cultural communication barriers, it is highly important to take into account the limitations in order to be able to reasonably interpret and evaluate the results. The possible limitations in conducting this research include, but are not limited to,

rogue variables that are hard to account for such as participants' personality types, willingness to speak to strangers, as well as other variables that exist on an individual basis. Also, a larger number of participants could possibly help us track down more patterns in the data pointing at cross-cultural communication breakdowns, although it is important to note that studies of a descriptive nature can bring valuable insight even with the limited size of the participant group. While designing this research, it was important to create a good context for participants to have conversations, as otherwise conversations might lack the cultural components that are the center of attention for this study, which leads to the next limitation: the chosen communicative task only partially demonstrating the manifestations of the cross-cultural communication barriers. The latter point needs to be further expanded, as it is also important to look at the design of this research as a limitation itself. Although the chosen format of the communicative task helped us gain interesting insight into the manifestations of cross-cultural barriers, it is necessary to account for the concept of ecological validity, which is meant to draw researchers' attention to the extent in which the research setting is approached in the real world. In the case of this study, the concept of ecological validity can be applied to the idea of the word-guessing game in relation to the natural flow of the process of communication. The communicative mechanisms used by the interactants to complete the task can potentially be found in any natural conversation; however, the format of the task creates specific boundaries for the interaction, which does not necessarily happen in a conversation that unfolds naturally. Another limitation that needs to be mentioned is also created by the boundaries associated with the format of the communicative task provided. In a real conversation when miscommunication is not purposefully studied, it does not necessarily have to affect the interaction in a radical way causing the interlocutors to lose control over their talk-in-

interaction. Harold Garfinkel (1967) introduced the notion of “let it pass” to emphasize that while analyzing any interaction it is important to keep in mind that there could be certain cases of misunderstanding that the interlocutors might notice without acknowledging to see if they are able to gather the details after they get more information during the conversation. The idea of “let it pass” is meant to remind the researcher that analyzing the observable features of the interaction could be potentially misleading as it does not allow one to see the interaction from the interlocutors’ perspective, which could result in zooming in on the details of the conversation that were intentionally ignored by the participants.

The aforementioned limitations are certainly important to take into account; however, they do not minimize the importance of making observations to find out more about the peculiarities of intercultural interaction and cross-cultural communication barriers in all their manifestations. This study can be considered a successful attempt at gathering meaningful insights about the cross-cultural barriers occurring in the intercultural interaction between native and non-native English speakers. The pair of native languages chosen for this study was English and Russian, but it would be also interesting to compare the results of this study with observations made while analyzing interactions built around other pairs of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Potential future research aimed at studying the manifestations of cross-cultural barriers could also focus on gaining more insight regarding the barriers that appear between English learners coming from different cultural backgrounds. Such qualitative studies could help further explore the concepts of cultural distance, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural competence, which would encourage the researchers to look deeper into the essential role of the communication barriers that in the end would promote a more positive image of different ways of thinking.

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